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# **The Application of Systemic Functional Linguistics to Teaching L2 Academic Writing**

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Susan Bowers

BA (Hons) English Language and Literature, PGCE (Secondary), Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics, Master of Arts in Education, Advanced Diploma in Child Development, RSA Diploma TEFL

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## *Abstract*

### *The Application of Systemic Functional Linguistics to Teaching Academic Writing in the context of EAP*

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a functional approach to grammar, originating with Michael Halliday (1985, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*). This study looks at the effect of incorporating SFL ideas into a more traditional Communicative course, working with a teacher and students at the University of Barcelona.

Classroom material was designed, based around texts from an exhibition on Darwin's 'The Origin of Species'. Two experimental groups and two control groups, from intermediate and advanced levels, taught by the same teacher, participated in the research. The experimental groups used the materials (representing about 10 hours of class time) in combination with their normal English course, while the control groups followed the traditional course only. The pre-test–post-test methodology involved the students in all 4 groups writing an essay before and after the course, and these texts formed the basis of the data analysis.

The data analysis stage explored the use of the SFL concepts of Theme and Thematic progression (the way that the Themes are linked) within the organisation of the student texts, and the contribution of these features to the development of cohesion. The methodology was therefore quantitative, with some qualitative material in the form of questionnaires for the students and written feedback from the teacher.

Quantitative results showed that the use of the materials, which were designed around a text-based approach to language learning, affected choices of both Theme type and Thematic progression. Within Theme type, interpersonal Theme changes were more apparent and more systematic (across all groups) than changes elsewhere, and may be linked to Thematic progression. Results for Thematic progression showed an increase in the number of post-test cross-referential Themes for both experimental and control groups, and a decline in the use of constant Theme for all groups except the intermediate control.

An awareness and effective management of Thematic choice and progression, together with related cohesive devices within a text, are therefore interpreted as important features of academic writing, and explicit teaching of them appears to contribute to the production of more successful texts in this context. Overall, teacher and student responses were positive, especially in the case of the intermediate group: the materials were seen as challenging, but interesting and useful.

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## *Abbreviations and colour coding*

**CAE** Cambridge Advanced

**CEFR** Common European Framework of Languages

**DDL** data driven learning

- EAP** English for Academic Purposes
- EFL** English as a Foreign Language
- EIM** Escola d’Idiomes Moderns
- ELT** English Language Teaching
- ESL** English as a Second Language
- ESP** English for Specific Purposes
- FCE** Cambridge First Certificate
- IELTS** International English Language Testing Systems
- L1** First language
- L2** Second language
- LERN** Literacy and Education Network
- N** native
- NN** non-native
- Pla** Pla d’Impuls de L’Anglès (Plan for the Promotion of English)
- SFL** Systemic Functional Linguistics
- SFG** Systemic Functional Grammar
- T-unit** an independent clause with its dependent clauses
- ZPD** Zone of Proximal Development

**Abbreviations in Texts:**

- ex** experimental
- cont** control
- L3** level 3

**L4** level 4

**pre** pre-test text

**post** post-test text

### **Abbreviations used in Division of Marked Themes:**

**C** Circumstantial

**DC** Dependent Clause

**HT** Heavy Theme

**NF** Non-Finite Clause

**TC** Thematized Comment

### **Colour Coding used in Thematic Progression:**

**Yellow**: Repeated Theme

**Blue**: Cross-Referential Theme

**Grey**: Derived Theme

**Pink**: dependent clause

**Dark Blue**: part of a chain

**Green**: interrupting clause

**Green**: referring Themes

**RED**: unsuccessful

**PS**: partly successful

**Student quotes**: given in italics. Black: level 3, **red**: level 4, **green**: CAE.

# Chapter 1: introduction

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## 1.1 Hypothesis

The main focus of the research described here emerged following many years of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Spain, most recently within the Escola d'Idiomes Moderns (EIM), the School of Modern Languages at the University of Barcelona. As an EIM teacher, I became increasingly aware of the difficulties students experience with discursive writing, and how as a department we seemed unable to reach a consensus regarding the most appropriate way of addressing these problems or improving results. Departmental perspectives and policies on materials, exam preparation and assessment failed to generate significant improvements. The focus on whole texts within EFL course books was often sporadic, with writing instruction reduced to lists of recommended lexical items and phrases and formulaic and simplistic descriptions of textual structure and organisation.

Thematic patterning in student texts was explored by the researcher during a 2007 pilot study for an Open University E835 course. This exploration highlighted problems with both *texture* and *text structure* (Butt et al. 2001:262), affecting (and indeed, ultimately determining) the overall accessibility of the writing. Although more recent course books might sometimes include longer texts, foci and emphases remain relatively unchanged; differences between genres are often minimised and presented as dependent upon vocabulary choice rather than more complex factors. I believe that this area of language teaching and learning raises unresolved questions potentially amenable to in-depth

analysis. With this in mind, the research was designed to generate useful and motivating work at classroom level, providing the practitioner with new tools for managing student writing. One of the predicted research outcomes was a deeper understanding of factors such as text structure on the part of both student and teacher.

The research problem is therefore identified within the area of foreign language teaching, and looks at discursive writing. The hypothesis was formulated following the initial study, in year one of this research:

***A text-based approach will enable students to produce written texts more consistent with native speaker texts than does the Communicative Approach.***

**1.2 Rationale**

Discursive or exposition texts are often taught as optional or required writing types, both as preparation for the Cambridge First Certificate (FCE) and Cambridge Advanced (CAE) exams and for internal examinations. In Barcelona, the Escola d’Idiomes Moderns, and the Escola Oficial d’Idiomes (subsidised by the *Generalitat*, the regional Catalan government), include these genres in their examinations. Recent initiatives throughout the Spanish educational system include The Generalitat’s 2007 *Pla d’Impuls de L’Anglès* (*Plan for the Promotion of English*), which incorporates guidelines for attainment levels proposed by the Council of Europe’s *Common European Framework of Languages* (CEFR) (1996). The *Pla* also offers suggestions for the development of pedagogical and linguistic skills for specialist English teachers with Spanish or Catalan as their first language, and those general subject teachers who may be required in the future to use English as a vehicle for teaching. The *Pla* is discussed within a 2008 report by Berga et al. involving the

collaboration of several Catalan universities and the 'Departament d'Educació' (Department of Education). The report describes many proposed changes and recommendations, a number of which establish a context for the present research; these include proposals to bring the EFL level of students at entrance to and on completion of university studies into line with levels established by the CEFR and with reference to the University of Cambridge exams, and also a discussion of compulsory credits taught through English. These credits would constitute a minimum of 10% of the undergraduate degree course, with a pass mandatory for graduation. These are proposals, and as such still under discussion, but it seems likely that coming years will see changes within the role of English Language Teaching (ELT) across the Spanish education system. Research into how to best prepare students and native and non-native teachers to manage these new requirements, must therefore be positive.

Although an outline of similarities and differences between pedagogical approaches is an element of the research, neither this nor evaluations of alternative methodologies are central concerns. Nevertheless, an awareness of current debates and developments within EFL, and the background for these, is necessary for establishing an informed context. Comparisons are therefore made with the Communicative Approach in particular, from a pedagogical rather than a linguistic perspective, as the research explores whether the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to student writing can create different outcomes from those generated through the use of more traditional methodologies. Nonetheless, a more specialised knowledge of SFL methods of analysis and studies implementing this methodology, is more relevant here (although they have proved difficult to locate). The development of professional knowledge is an important aim of the study.



The pilot study referred to above explored SFL features in direct relationship with native and non-native texts, highlighting areas of language use especially instrumental in the writing process. Although the sample size was very restricted, differences emerged between native and non-native text organisation, suggesting that an analysis of the linguistic strategies used for composition might provide the impetus for further study, and that thematic progression types described by Er (2001), for example, and possibly a choice of clause Themes (cf Martin, 2001) could constitute viable foci for teaching material for the present research.

When students' texts are difficult to follow and it is hard to pinpoint exactly what they are talking or writing about, the problem often originates in the choice of Themes and the expression of Rhemes.

(Butt et al., 2001:151)

Year one of the research focussed upon these ideas: by collecting and analysing data from native and non-native writers, it began the development of classroom materials based on SFL for use within the language teaching context outlined in section 3.3, below.

### ***1.3 Systemic Functional Linguistics: the conceptual framework***

Incorporating theory and resources developed from the work of Halliday (1985) within Systemic Functional Linguistics, a genre- or text-based approach works exclusively with complete texts, assuming a fundamental relationship between grammar, meaning and context (cf Butt et al., 2001). Authors adopting a genre-based approach (Burns, 1990, Feez, 2001) describe a teaching-learning cycle based on social interactions (although

stages may be combined or labelled distinctly), reflecting Vygotsky's view of learning as a social process, with knowledge 'co-operatively produced and shared' (Littleton, 1995:96).

Hyland comments that

the SFL pedagogic model typically conceives of the teaching and learning process as a cycle, allowing students different points of entry and enabling teachers to gradually and systematically expand the meanings students can create through increasingly sophisticated understanding of how texts work.

(Hyland, 2002a:126)

Gibbons and Marwick-Smith (1992) used SFL as a basis for this type of instructional cycle, and Er (2001) and Martin (2001) have described the analysis and development of student writing through a focus on Theme and Rheme.

An extremely important aspect of a functional grammar is the way information is structured in communication. If we are explaining something to another person, whether in speech or writing, we instinctively try to organize what we say in a way that will make it easier for the hearer or reader to understand (unless, of course, we are deliberately trying to confuse).

(Bloor and Bloor, 2004:64)

The theoretical basis for this study is realised in SFL and, more specifically, at sentence-level, the SFL concepts of Theme and Rheme. The link between theory and practice provides a conceptual framework for the research, with the pedagogical application of

SFL providing the focus. Theme and Rheme are essentially components of textual structure, closely bound up with and determining text coherence and cohesion:

A simple explanation of Theme in English is to think of it as *the idea represented by the constituent at the starting point of the clause...* In simple terms, then, a clause begins with a realization of the Theme. This is followed by the realization of the Rheme, which can be explained as being *the rest of the message*.

(Bloor and Bloor, 2004:71)

Halliday (1985:38) describes Theme as ‘the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say’, occupying (in English) initial position in the clause. The Rheme, in final position, follows on from the Theme, and several authors have discussed the ‘wave-like quality’ of the message in the clause (cf Moore, 2006). These are textual features traditionally unexplored in EFL course books. Nevertheless, my 2007 pilot study suggested that language features habitually focussed upon and emphasised during exam preparation, such as linking devices, although considered important by both native speakers interviewed for the study, may not be those which most fundamentally mark non-native/native textual differences. This hypothesis provided the rationale for the initial study.

The research is thus based on practical knowledge and classroom experience of pedagogical approaches to developing L2 writing, and on a more theoretical, open-ended and experimental knowledge drawn from an exploration of SFL and its associated research literature. The aim was to stimulate theoretical, content-based ideas, but the impetus has always been classroom methodology and procedural knowledge. These areas have been consistently identifiable as the main foci since the beginning of the study.

## 1.4 The initial study

A brief outline of the initial study carried out in year one of the research is included here, as outcomes were significant in determining the focus and direction of the main study, and in contributing to some changes from the original plan, especially with regard to Thematic progression type and to an understanding of the procedures involved with this type of text analysis. 'Thematic progression' refers to the movement and inter-connectedness of Theme and Rheme through a text: Thompson comments that

I generally find that Theme starts to make more sense once you examine it in terms of how Theme choices work together through a text to signal its underlying coherence, and to signal its 'method of development', in Fries' term.

Thompson (2004:165)

It became apparent, for example, that in order to understand Thematic choices and text development in combination, the data analysis stage would have to take in complete texts, rather than short extracts, as in this initial study. It was also manifest that this would be a long and complex procedure, so the decision was taken to limit the number of groups involved, a factor ultimately determined anyway by constraints of teacher and group availability. The aim was to orientate the research, and to develop a system of analysis which would be workable and appropriate in addressing the research questions. The setting for the initial study and the research was the EIM. Written data for the initial study were organised and categorised within the framework of Systemic Functional

Linguistics, concentrating on differences between native and non-native texts mainly at the level of Theme and Rheme.

The analysis isolated very specific features, and to justify its purpose the assumption was that Theme-Rheme disparities between native and non-native texts influence texts sufficiently to warrant exclusivity of focus within an instructional cycle. Other categories such as conjunction, logical relations and reference are suggested within the literature (Er, 2001, Painter, 2001): these are components of, but are not confined to, the SFL genre approach to text analysis, and are conventionally dealt with within the more traditional communicative methodologies. Texts for the initial study were analysed at clause level, after Halliday (1985) and Eggins (2004). Within the information potentially yielded, it was necessary to establish parameters and to attempt to identify features and patterns which would be manageable and useful within the practical constraints of the study and which might also inform the next stage of the research. This entailed restricting the level of detail; the exploration of clause type, for example, was limited to dependent clauses as Theme, rather than the more in-depth analysis of clause patterns characterising the main study. The analysis dealt only with the first 10 clauses of each text, as the procedure proved more lengthy and complex than anticipated, especially with native speaker texts. Two complete scripts from each group were analysed, however, so that the feasibility of this decision might be later evaluated. The two main areas of focus were Theme type and Thematic progression, in both instances those types which would be used later in the main study.

Although student text length here (as in the main research) was determined by exam requirements, some of the native-speaker texts were very long, meaning that much of the overall text progression was lost in the analysis. Nevertheless, the Theme-Rheme analysis

indicated sufficient disparity between native and non-native texts to validate its use as the main research category, with results for the limited number of clauses evaluated across all texts providing interesting and sufficient information for materials development.

### ***1.5 Implications for professional practice***

Cohen et al.: (2006:39) suggest that research will be judged 'methodologically and by the contribution that it makes to the field.'

With the changes to the university admission and awards systems outlined in section 1.2, above, students are likely to face more evaluation of their L2 writing in the future. The Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* level B2 might be a future requisite for graduation in all degrees, and higher degree courses offered partly or exclusively in English are now widespread among Spanish universities. Implications for professional practice are both immediate and long-term; within the context of possible political and organisational innovations, and taking into account increasing demands on teachers and students, the research described in the following chapters needs to be relevant academically and professionally. Divisions between the different ELT fields are nowadays less clearly defined, with students on general English courses increasingly needing the skills traditionally associated with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). It is hoped that findings will be transferable to students and teachers in other areas of language teaching, and that the materials will be appropriate for different types of groups and for use with non-native teachers. The aim is to increase teacher and student confidence in both text production

and comprehension, and to extend and diversify choices of methodology and materials. The knowledge acquired through the teaching-learning cycle might also be applied to future research and teacher-training, thus leading to an accumulation of knowledge and potentially contributing to understanding within a wider educational context.

# Chapter 2: literature review

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The literature review attempts to situate the study within an appropriate and understandable context, by outlining the relevant pedagogical research and approaches, and showing how the research questions arise from these considerations. The application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to the teaching of L2 writing and its relationship to other pedagogical models which have developed within genre theory is discussed. The theory behind the SFL model, together with some of the research in this tradition are explored; related but distinct fields, such as EAP are considered, and shared concerns highlighted. More specifically, descriptions and analyses of different types of Thematic progression within texts are described, from the perspectives of writers working more or less closely within a Hallidayan tradition, and studies analysing student texts within this framework are discussed. The review also looks at the translation of the SFL model into the classroom: it examines the basis for claims for the pedagogical effectiveness of genre-based material and locates a space for the present study within existing research.

## *2.1 Genre or text-based approaches*

The last decade or so has seen increasing attention given to the notion of genre and its application to teaching and learning. This is largely a response to changing views of discourse and of learning to write which



incorporate better understandings of how language is structured to achieve social purposes in particular contexts of use.

(Hyland, 2007:148)

The response referred to by Hyland may also be one to the realisation that academic and political changes affect both course content and evaluation, demanding a restructuring or at least a reconsideration of teaching goals and assessment criteria. Systemic Functional Linguistics assumes that the words we use encode different meanings, relating to different language functions, and that these meanings realise the relationship between context and language (Butt et al., 2001). This relationship is at the heart of Halliday's description of language and links directly with the notion of choice, explored below: 'all syntactic options occur in the environment of other options' (Halliday, 1967:215). Hyland (2003:170) also emphasises the fact that the writing process is situated always within a context, which shapes and sometimes determines the final text: 'writing involves writers making language choices in social contexts peopled by readers, prior experiences, and other texts'. Text is related to context, and the nature of the text depends upon 'context of situation' (Malinowski, in Christie, 1999). An awareness of interdependency within the language-context relationship, and the application of this knowledge to language and literacy education has generated new research and claims within the realm of genre teaching; nonetheless, experimental research focussing directly on the potential contribution of Theme and Rheme to textual cohesion has proved elusive. Consequently, this study is approached initially through the wider context of text-based research, collecting on the way insights and concerns of theorists and practitioners, and establishing the background to a more localised discussion of specific features of textual organization.

Three distinct but often overlapping schools have been identified within the research (Hyland, 2002b and Hyon, 1996): New Rhetoric, SFL and ESP (including EAP), the last two impacting especially on this study. Within these pedagogical traditions, the theory and applications of genre research have developed concurrently but distinctly. Australian genre theories have evolved mainly independently of ESP and New Rhetoric traditions (Hyon, 1996), using SFL as a central point of reference, while New Rhetoric genre studies have concerned themselves primarily with the social functions of genre, expressing reservations concerning the value of explicit genre teaching (cf Hyland, 2002a). Within ESP and EAP, however, authors such as Bhatia (2008) and Flowerdew (2000) have highlighted the need of L2 English students to understand the organisational and stylistic conventions of texts across disciplines, and discussed the role of genre teaching in achieving this. Materials and models for genre teaching have developed most successfully in the context of genre-based pedagogy and SFL, where researchers and practitioners have created strong links between theory and classroom application:

Across the three genre schools, the differences in energy given to pedagogical applications are also linked to researchers' beliefs about the usefulness of explicit genre instruction for language learning.

(Hyon, 1996:708)

The emergence of the Communicative Approach three decades ago (Richards and Nunan (1980), Littlewood (1981), Harmer (1983), Brumfit (1984), Allwright (1988)) triggered a movement away from the explicit grammar teaching associated with traditional grammar-translation and a reaction against the decontextualised, formulaic presentation of language characterizing audio-lingualism (cf Knight, 2005). But with time some writers and teachers have advocated the incorporation into the Communicative Approach of

more 'traditional' techniques, such as translation, an overt focus on structure, and a more teacher-centred form of instruction. Derewianka (2005:242) explores grammatical paradigms representing explicit grammar instruction, but defined in different ways, with special focus on the developing role of functional grammars: 'the concern of a pedagogical grammar is not so much theoretical consistency as accessibility, efficiency and usefulness', while Lock (1996:268) discusses learners' 'progressive control' of meaning. These ideas reflect Vygotsky's ZPD (zone of proximal development), defined as the gap between the students' current level of knowledge, and those areas of understanding where they might, with effective support, progress to. Classroom applications of genre pedagogies therefore both build upon and develop aspects of the Communicative methodology which came before. Authors such as Feez and Hasan (cited in Hyland, 2007) have questioned the inductive approach to writing with its characteristic focus on strategies rather than linguistic resources, and have raised doubts as to whether a preoccupation with fluency necessarily frees students from the 'constraints of grammar' (Hyland, 2007:150). In response to these concerns, genre approaches assume explicit discussion of the grammatical patterns of texts, within which students are offered an explanation of how text structure generates and conveys meaning, but with grammar and context treated as mutually dependent, rather than as discrete components (Hyland, *ibid.*).

The Communicative Approach arose from dissatisfaction with those language teaching methodologies that had gone before, primarily in the form of Grammar-Translation and Audiolingualism. The response of the Communicative Approach to these methods was to bring together form and function and to prioritise those communication skills which had been previously neglected, through a development and application of the notional-functional syllabus proposed by Wilkins (1976). It was thus the first teaching approach

whose name reflected the skills the learner was expected to acquire, rather than the techniques used within the methodology.

The Communicative Approach has always been open to different interpretations: Harmer (1983:38) calls it 'an umbrella term to describe methodology which teaches students how to communicate efficiently', but it does, nonetheless, have clear goals, the central one being the development of 'communicative competence'. The term was originally used by Hymes, in 1972, as a contrast to Chomsky's 'linguistic competence.' Hymes added the notion of appropriacy to Chomsky's concern with grammatical rules, proposing a model of language learning which focuses on how language is used in real-life situations. Knight explains the model:

The points of this model are as follows: what is formally possible in a language, what is feasible given the means of implementation, what is appropriate given the context, and lastly, what is in fact done.

(Knight, 2005:155)

Nunan (1987:141) states that a 'weak' communicative approach 'accepts the value of grammatical explanation, error correction and drill', but for others, such as Prabhu (1987) and Krashen (1981) these features are inconsistent with their understanding of the approach. In theory, the Communicative Approach gives equal consideration to the development of the 4 skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, but in practice more attention is generally paid to speaking and listening than to reading and writing. Discussing the possible application of a genre-based approach to classes more used to a Communicative Approach, Burns comments that:

typically in beginning ESL classes, reading and writing are consigned to second place and the focus is on the development of speaking and listening.

(Burns, 1990:201)

The role of the teacher reflects a move toward learner autonomy, and there is a perceived joint responsibility for learning underlying the group and pairwork activities characterising the approach:

we can no longer see teachers as teachers and learners simply as learners, because both are, for good or ill, “managers of learning”.

(Allwright, 1984:157)

The course book used for the level 3 group in the research was Inside Out Intermediate (2000), and this is taken to be representative of ‘communicative’ course books. The emphasis, as stated on the back cover of the intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced levels, is on the development of ‘real-life communication skills and powers of self-expression’ and the content (for all levels) is summarised in the following categories: *creative grammar work, personalised speaking tasks, contextualised lexis and realistic listening and speaking*. Writing is mostly left to the workbooks. The focus changes from unit to unit, but the topics usually reflect popular culture, and the style of activity and exercise are those found in all communicative coursebooks. There are a mixture of pair and group work activities, matching and gap-fills for grammar and short explanations for the grammar points under discussion. The activities in general are short and there are many photos and illustrations. There is not much opportunity for analysis of texts, except on a very superficial level. The lack of explicit focus on how language operates in

different social situations, and the need for a more developed and clear method of integrating reading and writing into the curriculum in order to develop literacy skills, has led to dissatisfaction among many researchers and teachers:

More and more, researchers and educators have begun to question some of the assumptions implicit in communicative approaches to second-language teaching which have failed to take into account a well-formulated theory of language.

(Burns, 1990:200)

This unease, together with the idea that genre teaching might offer a more systematic and detailed theory of language, is the basis for the present study.

Within genre or text-based approaches, EFL and ESP students are taught the 'formal, staged qualities of genres' (Hyon, 1996:701) for recognition and production, a conscious manipulation considered a necessary and powerful tool for both writers and teachers, if students are to understand how their writing can improve (Christie and Dreyfus, 2007, Burns, 1990). Hyland (2003:165) attributes growing interest in L2 discourse partly to 'the growing recognition among writing specialists that L2 students would be massively assisted if they had a clearer understanding of the structure of the texts they were expected to write'. Butt et al. (2001) give examples of the structure of text-types such as recount, narrative, procedure, information report, explanation, exposition, and discussion, while Hyland (2002b:62) outlines the 'schematic structure of some university genres', describing *analysis*, *discussion*, *argument*, and *report*. Coe (2006) believes that textual structure must be made explicit, and that the skills needed to manipulate different genres will not develop naturally without models and systematic practice at analysing them. Paltridge (2004:41) sees these model texts as providing 'the initial point

of focus in a genre-based language learning lesson', and discusses also the notion of '*gradual approximation*' as a feature of 'systemic genre-based classrooms' (ibid:40). Through this process students are presented with the model and then led through a series of scaffolded activities, culminating in the construction of their own texts.

Researchers who have looked especially and in detail at the associations between student writing, the methodological techniques described above, and the theoretical concepts of Theme and Rheme, include Martínez Lirola (2006), with a focus on Marked Themes and progression patterns, Weissberg (1984) and McCabe (1999). Both the latter investigate different choices of Thematic patterning, McCabe within the context of a wide-ranging and detailed study of Theme and Rheme in published texts, and Weissberg as part of an investigation into paragraph development in ESL classes. In line with this type of research centring on more specific language features within texts, Montañó Harman (1991) and McCabe (1999) introduce cross-cultural (Spanish and English) comparison into their studies, and discuss several areas of difference. These contribute to the background of the present study, which, although not aiming to present an in-depth contrastive analysis of the languages involved, has needed to remain aware of language features potentially influencing student writing and the teaching-learning process.

Hyland (2002b:37) extends these ideas to a consideration of how differences between native and L2 progression choices in combination with other interpersonal elements can be problematic. He offers a summary of research comparing L2 (second language) student writing with L1 (first language), in which Grabe and Kaplan (1996) cite among other features 'different uses of cohesion markers, in particular markers which are less facilitative and create weaker lexical ties' (Hyland, ibid.:38). Lee (2002:139) discusses why this might be: she suggests that 'the concept of coherence may be different in L1 writing',

thus making it especially important within the classroom. For Montañó Harman (1991:418), 'the logical development of text varies, depending on the native language of the writer'; she gives examples of languages whose patterns contrast with English, and describes Spanish texts as exhibiting more flexibility in ordering ideas, more use of subordination, and longer sentences. It may be that these differences in isolation do not necessarily affect textual cohesion, but that in combination they can increase the distance between native and non-native text construction. Similarly, Hyland (2003:167) comments that learner corpora data show that L2 writers 'make greater use of a smaller range of vocabulary, that they overuse items of high generality, and that they favour features which are more typical of spoken English.' This type of research is relevant here, as indicating where particular difficulties might lie, and how SFL might describe and clarify them.

From related areas of research, the field of corpus linguistics provides some learner corpus studies reflecting the use of spoken forms in written language by non-native speakers. Gilquin and Paquot (2008) look at academic writing from native speakers and EFL learners from 16 mother-tongue backgrounds, including Spanish. The use of lexical items is analysed and compared in 3 separate corpora: academic native English, spoken native English, and learner English, with the learner data generated from argumentative essays. The authors cite as problematic for EFL learners the fact that 'they tend to use features that are more typical of speech than of academic prose' (2008: Abstract). Four possible explanations are offered: 'the influence of speech, L1 transfer, teaching-induced factors and developmental factors' (ibid:41). Teaching-factors include 'the pernicious influence of undifferentiated lists of connectors found in textbooks' (2008:54), echoing the concerns discussed in chapter 1 of the present study. Lack of exposure to formal texts is not mentioned at this stage, although 'lack of knowledge of more formal alternatives' is



included as a fifth explanation in the conclusion of the draft paper (p15), but not in the final article. The corpora indicate that both native and non-native students overuse spoken-like items, leading the authors to conclude that ‘an oral tone in writing is not limited to foreign learners, but is actually very much part of the process of becoming an expert writer’ (2008:57). This links to the findings of Montañó Harman (1991), discussed in section 3.4.2., below, describing L1 student difficulty in understanding the distinct levels of formality required in spoken and written texts. Similarly, Knapp and Watkins (2005: 196) assert that ‘concepts such as addressing a distant or intangible audience, and the associated subtleties of positioning, are not a feature of written arguments until the later years of primary and early junior secondary’, and that it is, therefore, necessary to understand learner control of the structure and content of the genre of arguing as part of a developmental process.

In a related paper considering the outcomes of their aforementioned research, Gilquin and Paquot (2007) cite studies suggesting a lack of register-awareness among learners of English, even at advanced level, which generates ‘the overly oral tone of learner writing’ (2007:2). The article discusses ‘spoken-like overused lexical items’ (ibid.:3) such as *I think, to my mind, from my point of view, it seems to me*, and the solutions offered include activities comparing and contrasting registers:

Given learners’ lack of register awareness, it is important to include in the curriculum consciousness-raising activities, aimed at underlining the differences that exist between written and spoken registers.

(Gilquin and Paquot, 2007:8)

These differences surface also in a study by Flowerdew (1998), exploring corpus research using Halliday’s 3 metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal and textual). She outlines

studies using corpora and carried out within the framework of genre analysis, including research by Hyland and Milton (1997), which uses a corpus-based approach to analyse expressions of doubt and certainty in Cantonese and British students. Among the differences Hyland and Milton find are non-native writers' use of 'syntactically simpler constructions', and difficulties in communicating 'a precise degree of certainty' (Hyland and Milton, 1997:201). Their study, based on a corpus of one million words, deals with the complexity of modality; this is an area they assert to be especially problematic for L2 writers, especially 'the manipulation of degrees of probability' (ibid.:184). They suggest that the evidence from their text samples shows that 'students respond to these difficulties by mixing informal spoken and formal written forms and transfer conversational uses to academic genres' (ibid.:192).

Other studies looking at modality include Salazar and Verdaguer (2009) and Carrio-Pastor (2009). Salazar and Verdaguer, in a study carried out at the University of Barcelona, examine student argumentative writing. Their research shows that the students employed fewer lexical verbs (overusing verbs such as *know* and *think*) to convey modal meaning than did native writers. These findings coincide with those of Hyland and Milton (above), who found 'a more limited range of devices' (1997:201) in non-native speakers. Carrio-Pastor analyses a corpus of 50 scientific articles written by native speakers of English and 50 by non-natives. She attributes differences between the corpora to 'mother tongue interference in virtually all cases', although meaning was only very rarely obscured' (2009:221). She suggests that 'modal verbs related to certainty or uncertainty are used in a different way by both groups of writers. Spanish writers prefer to express findings assertively, whereas English writers prefer to be extra cautious and hesitant to assure the other's positive response' (ibid.:230) (cf Hyland and Milton, above). The difficulty that non-native writers have in getting published is attributed here to these

variations, and is an important factor for consideration. Along these lines, Hyland and Milton describe how errors with the expression of doubt and uncertainty

not only influence readers' judgments of coherence and comprehensibility, but can also affect the impact of the argument, and how the academic competence of the writer is evaluated.

(Hyland and Milton, 1977:201)

Flowerdew (1999) echoes these concerns, and identifies key areas of difficulty for non-native writers. Nonetheless, although the list includes grammatical difficulty, other points such as 'structuring of argument', 'relating text to audience' and 'ways in which to make knowledge claims' (ibid.:127) were considered more problematic by journal editors. He asserts that:

in my own work in reviewing academic papers written by NNS, both in my field and in the sciences, I have similarly felt the "surface" errors to be less problematic than the more abstract features of these papers.

(Flowerdew, 1999:127)

This aspect of writing is discussed throughout the present study, especially in sections 6.1.1 and 7.3. The Teacher's Notes for Lesson 8 emphasise the importance of these 'abstract features', and comment on them in the following way: 'It is important for students to understand at least some of what is a very complex area of grammar, because people outside the classroom are likely to be less tolerant of errors with this type of (interpersonal) meaning than they would be with other areas of the language' (Teacher's Notes, Lesson 8, p.24).

The language features and understandings highlighted by the corpus research here need to be incorporated into classroom materials if they are to translate into methodology. Harwood (2005) reviews corpus-based studies comparing the language included in text books with that used by academic writers, and judges the text books to be 'pedagogically unsound' (2005:150): 'textbooks are found to understate the enormous disciplinary variation in style and language which corpora reveal' (ibid.). Echoing the concerns of many of the studies discussed above, he highlights modality as a feature dealt with unsuccessfully in textbooks, through 'inaccurate descriptions' (ibid.:156) and misinformation as to its use. While accepting that the methodology of the corpora studies may be problematic, especially in an over-reliance on expert texts, rather than a wider range of writing, he believes strongly that corpus data should underlie the design of textbooks. Within the present study, the aim is to explore the language needed by students, but which may not be provided by current materials.

Cultural, social and linguistic diversity within contemporary classrooms are contributing factors to the need for a more explicit focussing on how texts are organised grammatically and semantically; 'cognitive homogeneity' (Hyland, 2007:149) is less likely nowadays to feature in many classrooms, and students present a range of previous learning experiences and cultural knowledge, making them variously prepared for coping with writing demands. Paltridge describes the use of 'ethnographies' to enable students to understand the expectations and values forming the context of the texts they have to produce:

it is only when they are aware of these factors that they are really able to understand what they are being asked to do and the extent to which they can make appropriate choices.

Paltridge (2006:236)

A text-based approach facilitates a description of the stages to students (Hyland's 'visible pedagogy', 2003:26), and, fundamentally, provides teachers with the tools to identify genre characteristics and to understand why a text is unsuccessful. At the heart of this study are the questions *Why does this text not sound right? What is it that is making it difficult to follow?*

Nonetheless, where authors such as Christie (1999) have interpreted the above as features empowering students, others have seen undesirable prescriptivism and a constraining focus on structure and form. Concerns about prescriptivism are reflected in the reservations of New Rhetoric scholars and those authors favouring a process rather than product approach toward explicit genre teaching (cf Flowerdew, 1993). Freedman (1994) talks about 'a recipe theory of genre', while Sawyer and Watson (cited in Hyon, 1996) and Dixon (in Hyland, 2007) suggest that explicit teaching of genres restricts creativity. Exploring teachers' attitudes to genre teaching, Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) also report worries about prescriptivism. ESP and SFL authors, however, such as Hyland (2007), Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) within the context of critical literacy, and Coffin (2001) have discussed but ultimately not shared these concerns, believing that a certain amount of prescriptivism is necessary, and that research does not show it to be a negative component of genre teaching.

SFL theorists and applied linguists working in the fields of ESP and EAP believe that the explicit teaching of generic structures and their

associated grammatical features can help learners (particularly non-native speakers of English) to master the functions and linguistic conventions of texts necessary for successful participation in a range of disciplines and professions.

(Coffin, 2001:113)

To understand how genres work, students need a guide to text structure. Hewings and Hewings (2005:80) comment that 'it is important to guard against teaching genres as a set of templates to be copied unswervingly', but the lack of any explicit guidance is equally unhelpful. Cook, for example, (1997) challenges a focus on meaning rather than form, arguing that encouraging authentic or 'natural' language does not necessarily promote learning. Cope and Kalantzis describe how the LERN (Literacy and Education Network) teaching-learning cycle used widely within Australian genre-teaching emerged from a growing discontent with process writing pedagogies 'that deemphasize direct instruction about text form' (in Hyon, 1996:709) and Hammond (1987, in Hyon, *ibid.*) suggests that without direct explanations as to how language works, some students will fail. These explanations need to take context and assessment criteria into account: Paltridge (2006:235) asserts that, as an example of a genre, an academic essay is 'a socially approved way in which students show what they know, what they can do, and what they have learned in a course of study' and that expectations of the context, and the students' previous learning experience come together within the writing process. It has been suggested that text types are not static, but fluid and open to manipulation, and authors such as Hyland (in McDonough, 2005) and Painter (2001) see possibilities for creativity within the conventions of genre. Hyland asserts that students are 'assessed on their products' (*ibid.*:60), and that textual conventions must be understood before they can be

manipulated. He denies that genre teaching is '*inherently* prescriptive': although genres limit the writing process, he believes that students need to be aware of the options in order to make language choices, and that many students are reassured by notions of consistency and structure (2007:152). Research, nonetheless, has shown that teachers may be worried about prescriptivism.

Genre teaching is necessarily prescriptive to a certain extent, as the idea of a genre depends on characteristic textual features, and SFL researchers mainly agree that this explicit focus on form is a necessary starting point for student writing. Differences may arise because New Rhetoric research often describes L1 contexts whereas SFL classrooms might also involve a foreign or second language context. Genre or text-based approaches, by definition, incorporate the belief that texts belonging to a genre exhibit similarities recognisable and identifiable to members of a given community, generating expectations (Hyland's '*schema* of prior knowledge', 2007:150) which shape our understanding (or misunderstanding) of what we read, and are instrumental in interpreting and constructing new texts. Readers and writers have been compared to dancers tracing each other's steps (Hoey, in Hyland, *ibid.*), and the inherent complexity and reciprocity of these movements was a contributing impetus for this study. The origin and type of expectations are explored differently across the genre traditions, some prioritising the social perspective, others emphasising more the internal textual features. But in all cases, language and context work together, meaning that language choice is approached distinctly from Communicative course books, with the achievement of certain purposes and an emphasis on meaning, rather than language itself, as the starting point. Hyland comments that interview data are used increasingly to take text analyses beyond a surface description and to link linguistic choices to social and cultural models, enabling researchers to understand more clearly how students use the L2 to express meaning

(2003:168). Indeed, without this type of information it is difficult to describe what is happening in a text in any way beyond the very superficial.

Mainstream EFL course books are often organized around topics which seem very distant from the academic writing required of students in their wider university studies. *Inside Out Intermediate* (Kay et al., 2000) includes units on soap operas, the paparazzi and celebrities, dating and fashion, while *Inside Out Upper Intermediate* (Kay et al., 2001) has Attraction (cosmetic surgery and dating), Body (fitness, smoking), Family (relationships), and Ritual (football, weddings). Both course books describe their contents as 'a rich selection of accessible and entertaining texts: cartoons, postcards, letters and extracts from newspapers, magazines and novels' (ibid.). Some topics are very culturally-specific, and many demand class discussion of a personal nature which some students find uncomfortable. This series is not unrepresentative of EFL course books used extensively in Spain. The content makes assumptions about learner interest and engagement, but these assumptions should not conflict with teacher expectations of student writing. For students to understand the constraints and features of different genres, classroom materials must provide well-constructed and engaging models for text production. Coe (2006) discusses the type of genre students are likely to need:

We should teach genres that embody the kind of thinking that students will need or want or ought to be able to do (e.g., the traditional student essay which, like most academic genres, requires evidence-based, inductive reasoning).

(Coe, 2006:246)

There is an identifiable need for more well-written and academically-orientated texts, for students to become comfortable and confident with this input type from the early stages



of learning. The Discussion chapter below describes how lower-level students in particular reacted positively to the text-based input, despite the challenging nature of the material. It may be that the earlier the target material is introduced, provided the level is gauged correctly, the more readily accepted it is. Students and teachers are under increasing pressure to combine university degrees with language learning, and classroom materials should reflect and support these demands. This study explores the type of texts that might do this.

## *2.2 Systemic Functional Linguistics: the theory and research*

SFL has its roots in Hallidayan functional linguistics and sociocultural theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). It did not initially develop as a pedagogical theory (Christie, 1999), although Halliday did design an SFL-based scheme for primary level English teaching in the 1970s, and the theory's view of language as meaning-based has encouraged researchers and course designers to explore classroom applications. Much research into language teaching and learning from an SFL perspective has incorporated Vygotskian ideas of collaboration and scaffolding (cf Butt et al., 2001). Language choices stem from differences in register options: the structure and meaning of clauses are interpreted with reference to ideational (or experiential), interpersonal and textual meaning, realised in the expression of field (topic), tenor (relationship of participants) and mode (role of language). Classroom focus is on how functional elements of language structure realise available options from these three general areas (Tucker 2002). For Martinez,

systemic theory interprets linguistic behaviour as choice. Meanings are made by choosing, and therefore interpretation of an actual linguistic

choice is made against the background of potential, but not effected, alternative choices.

(Martinez, 2003:105)

For Martin (2001:151) the 'focus is on paradigmatic relations – on what you say in relation to what you could have said'. *Thematic* structure as defined by Halliday (1985), Eggins (1994) and Butt et al. (2001) concerns the organisation of information within individual clauses and within the text as a whole.

Whereas traditional grammar models highlight language structures, SFL focuses upon the connections between the structure of a text and the clauses within it and culture and social situation (cf Coffin, 2003). SFL is associated with authors such as Halliday and Hasan (1976), Martin (1992), Christie (1999) and Eggins (2004), who have developed definitions of genres within an SFL framework, defining them as *staged, goal-oriented social processes* (cf Hyland's 'broad rhetorical patterns' 2007:153). These genres include, amongst others, *narratives, recounts, arguments, and expositions*. Martin (1992) describes these more narrowly as elemental genres which when combined make up more complex macro genres. This study focuses on 'discursives' (or 'discussion') as one of these elemental genres. Coffin et al. (2009:249) discuss how SFL views genre 'from a linguistic perspective', considering the grammatical and structural features 'shared by texts that have a common social purpose' (ibid). For discursive texts, these purposes are defined by Butt et al. (2001) as the examination of different sides of an issue and the exploration of distinct perspectives, leading to an informed decision. The notion of macro genres, though, is useful when considering how student control of one text type might facilitate a wider understanding of other writing, as different genres display characteristic structures (Ghadessy, 1995).

Contemporary genre theory has been especially influential in Australia, where SFL, mainly as developed by Halliday, Hasan, Martin, and Matthiessen (1999) has been widely adopted in L1 and L2 curriculum design. Genre-based programmes, used initially in primary and secondary schools, have been offered more recently to adults on migrant English education and workplace training programmes (Hyon, 1996). Pedagogical projects such as the Literacy and Education Research Network (LERN), founded in the late eighties by researchers committed to genre-based teaching within an SFL framework, have impacted greatly upon the Australian educational system. Developed originally to encourage children's understanding of genre, it has been incorporated since into adult text-based syllabus design, and continues to evolve and change (Feez, 2001). The present study assumes that SFL theory and methodology is relevant across ages and classroom types.

The SFL pedagogic model describes the teaching and learning process as cyclical, implementing the notion of scaffolding associated with Vygotsky and Bruner through the teaching-learning cycle. The cycle moves from very controlled activities toward learner autonomy (Hyland, 2007), and demands an active and supportive teacher role (Christie, 1999, Hyon 1996). The model reflects 'Vygotskian notions of the social interactional nature of communication and learning' (Knight, 2005:163) and this central role of interaction within the language learning process is highlighted also by Paltridge (2004). The emphasis on initial teacher guidance stems from the belief that the teacher's role is pivotal, and 'teacher-learner interaction is valued as much as interaction between learners' (Feez, 2001:214). The continual adjustment of support level offered by the teacher within a scaffolding situation is fundamental to the management of the cycle, and reflects Bruner's 'handover' principle (Tharp and Gallimore, 1998). Scaffolding itself may take different forms, including the use of 'writing frames' (Wray and Lewis, in Hyland,

2007:158); these are skeletal outlines, or genre templates designed to support writing, and within the current research these templates provide a framework for exploring textual organisation. Painter (2001:170) stresses that 'the purpose of a genre determines its shape (i.e. its schematic structure)'. Nonetheless, these ideas are not always easily implemented, especially in less teacher-directed classrooms. Hyland (2002b:21) describes a 'highly-interventionist' teacher, and for Knapp and Watkins (2005:80) 'what has also proved problematic with the implementation of the text-type approach to genre theory is the degree of teacher direction it requires'.

Research from the different pedagogical schools discussed above links methodology more or less overtly to the teaching of textual features identified within SFL. The design of the cycle is outlined by various authors adopting a genre-based approach, including Burns (1990), Hyon (1996), and Feez (2001); they describe a teaching-learning cycle based on social interaction, although stages may be combined or labelled distinctly, reflecting Vygotsky's view of learning as a social process, with knowledge 'co-operatively produced and shared' (Littleton, 1995:96). The social constructivist view of the importance of context and culture in learning is central to genre teaching; Vygotsky's emphasis on the role of the social environment and culture, and interactions among learners and between learner and teacher are assimilated logically into the teaching and learning cycle. His ideas of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and reconstruction, dealing with the same situation at a progressively higher level, underlie the methodology and theoretical ideas activated within the teaching-learning cycle, and determine the teacher role within the learning process. Coffin (2001) sees the model as developing language control and encouraging critical reflection. This last is an aspect particularly associated with the New Rhetoric school, but links also to the SFL notion that students who understand how 'valued' texts are constructed are better equipped to engage critically with the messages

within these texts (cf Johns, 2006:169). The present study incorporates the cycle into a traditional course structure.

Researchers have used the above ideas to focus on diverse aspects of language development, mainly, although not exclusively, within written rather than spoken texts. Burns (1990) uses SFL and the concept of genre and register, together with a description of a teaching-learning cycle, to illustrate the benefit of this approach to beginner adult ESL learners; she attributes student success to explicit descriptions of the organisation, language features and structure of the genre, here a letter of application. She criticizes the Communicative Approach for producing many different methodologies under one umbrella (although perhaps as an 'approach' rather than methodology, this was not necessarily unintentional or unjustifiable), and for generating pedagogical practices seemingly stemming from 'intuition':

ESL pedagogy has failed to make explicit to learners the knowledge they need to gain access to socially powerful forms of language. It has emphasised inquiry learning, process and naturalism but has neglected to offer learners systematic explanations of how language functions in various social contexts.

(Burns, 1990:200)

The study is interesting, but descriptive, not experimental: with no control group, results are difficult to substantiate or quantify. A later (2007) study by Moyano in Argentina explores the development of discourse abilities in L1 Spanish within a pre-university literacy and communication course, also using SFL and a teaching-learning cycle. Results are positive in terms of literacy and also motivational development, the latter of interest as a factor often missing from formal evaluations. Coffin (2003) focuses on error analysis

in EFL using SFL as a diagnostic tool, and introducing notions of experiential, interpersonal and textual grammar. The study advocates the use of a text-based syllabus for language programme design, and the incorporation within course materials of both more and less successful examples of the target genre. This is a resource already familiar to many language teachers, either as a course-book component or individual teacher initiative, with student texts analysed as examples of writing types, and compared with model texts. And finally, Gibbons and Marwick-Smith (1992) look at L2 modalization using instructional cycles; they offer one of the few experimental studies describing the development of specific grammatical or functional features within the SFL model and comparing findings with those of more traditional methods. Results show considerable improvement in learner control of modality, with the overall number of clauses modalized equalling that of the native speaker control group. Before the teaching learning cycle, modality was rarely used in the students' writing. The findings provide an interesting point of reference for the present study.

The description of language function through ideational (or experiential), interpersonal and textual meaning, is a fundamental feature of SFL theory; nonetheless, although authors such as Butt et al. (2001), Myers (2001), Shaw and Liu (1998) and Knapp and Watkins (2005) have explored interpersonal features and modality in student writing, McCabe (1999:226) comments that 'there are not many analyses which specifically report on interpersonal elements in the Themes of the clauses.' Hyland (2002b) and Jones (2005:46) examine this language area in detail, and their thinking has contributed to the interpretation and discussion of results described below. Similarly, Thompson (2004:75) and Butt et al. (2001) discuss appraisal, related to modality and included in the text analysis here, while Downing and Locke (2002) offer a module on modality within a chapter on viewpoint.

Elsewhere, studies such as Carrell (1985) and Henry and Roseberry (1998) compare a text-based approach with more traditional methods, although the focus is mainly on the macro-structure of a text, analysing the moves for establishing coherence and progression in discourse, rather than on more specific language or textual features. Nonetheless, Henry and Roseberry identify both aspects as fundamental:

The aim of genre-based language teaching is to raise learners' awareness of both the rhetorical organization and the linguistic features closely associated with the genre.

(Henry and Roseberry, 1998:147)

Carrell looks at ESL reading, and Henry and Roseberry at writing. Both studies adopt a pre-test - post-test design, and both yield positive results. Henry and Roseberry also use a genre group and non-genre control group (with 6 hours of 'genre-based instruction' for the former) in line with the present research. Carrell cites the lack of experimental research as a stimulus for her work, stating that no empirical research has as yet clarified the effects of direct text structure instruction on ESL reading comprehension. Her conclusion, that explicit teaching of text structure significantly increases the amount of information that intermediate ESL students remember, might, however, derive from the methodological design: the initial instructions stage emphasised to the experimental group (but not to the control group) the need to think about how they were reading and to remember information. There are also some methodological aspects of the Henry and Roseberry study which invite clarification: they claim higher scores for cohesion and coherence post-test for the experimental ('genre') group, but it is unclear how these concepts were operationalised. In addition, the experimental group were taught by one

of the researchers, and the control group by a teacher uninvolved in the research. This could result in bias, a possibility mentioned by the authors, but dismissed (ibid.:155).

Since Carrell's study more than two decades ago, authors such as Hyon (1996) have shown positive effects for genre instruction on student reading, but experimental research is still lacking. Tardy (2006) discusses thirteen studies (including the Henry and Roseberry research described above) which she says are exceptions, but research has nevertheless been mainly non-experimental. Studies described in Bloor and Bloor's (2004) chapter on the applications of functional analysis, for example, are still essentially descriptive, incorporating the premise that an SFL functional theory of language is a valid and useful teaching resource. Lee (2002:153), in research described in section 2.5, below, recommends that 'an experimental or quasi-experimental study could be conducted to find out whether any causal relationship between coherence instruction and students' writing can be identified'.

### *2.3 English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP)*

Within ESP and EAP, the concept of genres is realised differently (cf Hyland, 2007), fundamentally in the interpretation of who they belong to; rather than focussing on the wider community to provide a context, genres are equated with particular academic and professional groups. Nonetheless, as with SFL, through the study of example texts the approach incorporates the identification of characteristic 'stages', 'relatively stable components of (a genre's) organization, that we can recognize in some form in text after text of the genre' (Martin and Rose, 2003:9). Students are thus familiarized with the



generic models common to an English-speaking culture (Christie, 1999). The methodology used by the main proponents such as Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) is similar to the SFL approach described above, but the texts are typical of either workplace or university. The link with the present study comes mainly from this university connection; growing numbers of students are required to understand and produce texts in English within their field of study, and it is conceivable that EFL practices and methodologies such as needs analysis and genre approaches, perhaps more traditionally associated with EAP, are filtering into general ELT courses (Hyland, in interview with McDonough, 2005). Within these classrooms, Hyland sees the contribution of genre-teaching as mainly connected with 'consciousness-raising' (creating meanings unfamiliar to many students) and the 'teaching-learning cycle' (ibid.:61). In line with this idea of genre-based pedagogy bringing together distinct areas of language teaching, Hüttner comments that

genre analysis changed the conception of EAP, towards a view of clusters of independent genres with distinct purposes and move structures.

(Hüttner, 2008:152)

She looks especially at EAP writing requirements, and discusses how models available to students can be made appropriate and achievable. Research by Hyland and Tse (2004) and Hyland (1995) has explored different aspects of SFL theory within an EAP framework, looking at acknowledgements in graduate dissertations, using genre analysis to show linguistic patterns and generic structure, and hedging in scientific writing. Coffin (2004) analyses student scripts from IELTS (International English Language Testing Systems) tests requiring short argument essays, and discusses research into argumentation, providing a framework for the analysis of argumentative texts. Her exploration of the differences

between exposition and discursive texts is particularly relevant here, where the classification of distinct argument structures was applicable to the materials development stage. But of special interest also are the conclusions she draws from test results:

it is clear that it is not necessarily an absence of argument structure which explains a low score. In fact, several low scoring candidates followed conventional English argument structures, showing that the reason for their low marks was related to their lack of control of other linguistic features.

(Coffin, 2004:243)

Although she does not suggest what these might be, her comments support the idea of successful text organization involving features in addition to those concerned with macro-structure. Knapp and Watkins underline the dangers of concentrating on structural features and 'schematic stages' of texts at the expense of grammar: 'it is at the level of grammar that much generic variation occurs' (2005:79-80). Jones (2005) also discusses argumentation, using Theme analysis as the main analytical tool, while Storch and Tapper examine the impact of an EAP course on postgraduate writing, using a test re-test design. They analyse texts for structure and cohesion, with evaluations such as 'main points are clear and appropriate links are present' (2009:220). These assessment criteria are imprecise, though, and difficult to replicate or substantiate. The authors do not describe in detail the course components, asserting rather that their focus is on areas such as structure, fluency, accuracy and academic vocabulary: these are very difficult to measure or quantify, so results are not easily contextualized. Improvements are reported 'mainly in terms of accuracy, use of academic vocabulary and structure' (ibid.:207), but the absence of a control group prevents any direct comparison.

Although much ESP research has not attempted to provide detailed classroom methodologies, some researchers such as Bhatia, Flowerdew, and Swales, have ultimately offered more explicit guides to classroom application (Hyon, 1996). Paltridge (2004:40) suggests that the language learning tasks and models in many 'ESP genre-based course-books' can be viewed as scaffolding activities, and Hyland (in McDonough, 2005:61) believes that 'most of what is going on in academic writing classrooms is informed by genre.'

## *2.4 Theme and Rheme*

In English, as in many other languages, the clause is organized as a message by having a special status assigned to one part of it. One element in the clause is enunciated as the theme; this then combines with the remainder so that the two parts together constitute a message.

(Halliday, 1985:38)

This Theme system which Halliday describes is pivotal in the organisation of the clause and in establishing overall textual cohesion (Martinez, 2003); it is where the message begins, and choices made here significantly affect the reader's interpretation and understanding of ideas and arguments within the text. Thompson suggests that rather than Halliday's original idea of Theme being 'what the clause is about', 'it is better to keep to the idea of Theme as 'the point of departure of the message' or 'that which locates and orients the clause within its context' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:64)' (2004:143). Despite a developing awareness of the need for work on coherence and cohesion, however, many course books fail to consider how meaning is structured within and

between sentences. By approaching non-native sentence construction difficulties from the perspective of Theme, this study provides an alternative to a traditional grammatical focus, by taking into account the 'very large paradigm of thematic options' (Halliday, 1967:243) available for any average-length clause.

Researchers looking at Theme and Rheme within the fields of ESP or EAP include McCabe (1998), with an analysis of Theme and Thematic patterns in Spanish and English history textbooks and Moore (2006), with a description of Theme-Rheme patterns in technical writing. Moore analyses in detail the organisation of meanings within the clause, along with an explanation of the concepts of New and Given information. Halliday uses the term 'Given' for elements either mentioned before or known to the reader, and 'New' for previously unknown information and the main focus of the message. Moore (2006) offers the following clarification:

In the majority of cases, Theme coincides with Given and Rheme coincides with New, but they do not need to. When they do coincide, readability is increased as it is the default, or unmarked, pattern; the pattern that readers expect to find.

(Moore, 2006:43)

Moore discusses how this pairing of Theme with Given and Rheme with New contributes to cohesion, using example texts to illustrate how simple Thematic adjustments improve accessibility. Together, Theme and Information Structure create "texture": they are identifiable within the clause, but the texture of a text is developed through their behaviour across clauses and sentences (2006:47). Similarly, Weissberg (1984:489) comments that the distribution of information within sentences helps determine the 'comprehensibility' of written texts. He uses the labels *topic* and *comment* within

information slots rather than *Theme* and *Rheme*, to discuss thematic patterning in reports from published research.

Bloor and Bloor (2004) discuss the problems of inexperienced writers with aspects of composition connected to the Theme-Rheme and Given-New dimensions of grammar, and recommend more classroom attention to this area. Taboada and Lavid (2003) focus (unusually) on spoken rather than written texts, in an exploration of Theme in English for English and Spanish L1 speakers. Thematic selection and progression is incorporated into conversation analysis, and results analysed within an SFL Thematic patterning and genre framework. Themes here are described as textual, interpersonal and /or ideational, in line with Halliday's definitions. The SFL ideational metafunction is subclassified into the experiential and logical modes (Bloor and Bloor, 2004), and the thematic experiential constituent is referred to as the 'topical Theme' (Halliday, 1985:54) or sometimes the 'experiential Theme' (Thompson, 2004:159). Marked Themes are taken up by Martínez Lirola (2006) and Thompson and Thompson (2009). The latter discuss contentious issues within Theme identification, through in-depth text analysis and relating Marked Themes to the organisational structure of texts: 'the marked Themes within a stage mainly appear to contextualise the events of that stage at a more micro-level'. Nonetheless, the concept of a Theme-Rheme structure to describe a clause is not universally accepted; Fawcett (2007:12) (unpublished) comments that 'it seems reasonable to question the widely-held assumption that there is 'a unified concept of theme'', and argues that Thematic progression is not a viable characteristic for analysis. He suggests that there is no general agreement on the identification of Theme, and that the concept itself is often oversimplified, leading to unclear hypotheses about Thematic progression.

Butt et al. (2001), Fries (cited in Er, 2001), and Er (ibid.) have identified and described two types of Thematic progression: *cross-referential*, where the Rheme of one sentence links to the Theme of the next, and *parallel progression*, where consecutive Themes are linked. Patterns for Taboada and Lavid (2003) are, among others, *simple linear*, *constant*, *derived* and *hyperthematic*, compared with Moore's *linear*, *constant* and *derived*, and *hypertheme* (2006). Taboada and Lavid also introduce the concepts of *gapped*, *contiguous*, *themic* and *rhemic* to develop more complex types. As with Moore, their study is descriptive rather than experimental, employing SFL as an analytical tool, rather than with any direct pedagogical application. In related research, Er (2001) and Martin (2001) have described the analysis and development of student writing through a focus on Theme and Rheme. Er offers this as an efficient method of writing assessment, which can help clarify for students areas of improvement, while Martin argues for an awareness of functional grammar on the part of teachers: both see an understanding of text organization as central to strengthening the effectiveness of teaching strategies. Er highlights the relationship between Theme and cohesion: 'a more detailed analysis of thematic progression ... would be useful in showing the student how text cohesion could be improved' (2001:232). Similarly, Martinez (2003) examines the Thematic structure of native speaker biology research articles, incorporating Theme type and markedness as variables. The corpus selection process employs Mauranen's (1996) concept of a thematically good text, thus offering an interesting frame of reference for the present study:

We here take the typical native speaker user in edited and published texts as a criterion for acceptable use, and regard any text that meets this criterion as "good". In this way, all L1 texts in the material are good texts by definition. Even though they cannot be held up as ideal models,

their typical features can be used as a guide to the working of text in that language.

(in Martinez, 2003:108)

Student goals might include the production of texts resembling those written by native speakers, but this aim is contestable and not always accepted as either realistically attainable or desirable. Nonetheless, this study assumes that native speaker texts, even when unpublished, can provide the type of benchmark referred to above, and that functional grammar can help clarify linguistic choices opaque to or managed unsuccessfully by L2 speakers. For Gibbons and Marwick-Smith (1992:97) native texts provide 'a yardstick for comparison'.

## ***2.5 Cohesion***

„ Having read enough ESL compositions to notice attempts by ESL writers to mimic the use of cohesive ties, I have been struck by the number of these highly cohesive compositions which are incoherent. Moreover, I have also encountered some coherent compositions lacking in cohesive ties.

(Carrell, 1984:165)

Carrell is making the point that cohesion is complex, and that students will not be helped to achieve it in their writing simply through 'the mechanistic devices of explicit cohesive ties' (ibid.:165). Cohesion and coherence are at the heart of the research; Thematic choice plays a central role in textual meaning, and appropriate Thematic selection

generates organised and comprehensible texts (Eggins, 2004, Halliday, 1985). Eggins (ibid.) explains the negative effect on coherence created through a lack of Thematic structure: this type of example has direct application for materials development, as it enables students and teachers to understand more clearly the role of Thematic organisation.

The composition features focussed upon here are the organisation and structuring, at sentence level and above, of discursive texts. Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* (1976) was instrumental in raising awareness within EFL of an aspect of writing previously neglected; cohesion is defined as a semantic concept, referring 'to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text' (ibid.:4). Bloor and Bloor (2004) also comment that other linguistic aspects of textual coherence, such as thematic patterns, have only recently been considered by teachers and course book writers. Lee (2002) investigates the teaching of coherence, in an attempt to deal with an area of language teaching which she cites as especially problematic:

At the beginning of the course, the students were asked what they understood to be 'effective writing'. All of them said "grammatical accuracy" was the most important, and the next was "vocabulary". When asked about coherence, all said that it was an alien concept to them.

(Lee, 2002:150)

The analysis of text structure, even now, is 'irregular' (Mera Rivas, 1999:15). Trebits (2009) asserts that it receives less attention in EFL than in ESP courses, perhaps corroborating Hyland's comments about genre, above. Her corpus-based study analyses conjunctive cohesion in EU documents, with the aim of compiling teaching materials for



ESP and general English courses. The study is based on frequency and examples of use, incorporating categories following the work of Halliday and Hasan, but without developing the results into accessible classroom material. The 'DDL' (data driven learning) (ibid.:203) activities recommended represent an attempt to relate theory to classroom practice, but illustrate the difficulty of applying corpora analysis directly to pedagogical activity. The concordance-based exercises focus on the use of conjunctions, and Trebits asserts that this 'meaningful and authentic language data' (ibid. 209) will increase students' writing skills. Nonetheless, the density and number of examples (13 for *in order to*) and the lack of context (the language items are presented within isolated sentences, with no full texts included), raise real doubts about these claims.

Within the classroom, research into cohesion includes that of Martínez Lirola (2006), who uses SFL as a framework for evaluating students' writing and exploring coherence, and Lee (2002), who describes a classroom inquiry into teaching coherence to ESL students. Martínez Lirola discusses how 'text linguistics' increases students' literacy, using SFL 'as a framework of analysis to evaluate students' writing and reflect on the relationship between linguistic links across sentences and textual coherence' (2005: abstract). In one of the few studies making explicit reference to Thematic patterning in student writing, she asserts that her analysis 'offers the possibility of studying the effect that marked themes have in texts and the importance of thematic progression patterns to organise the information in a text (Continuous or 'constant', Linear or 'zig-zag' pattern' and Split Rheme pattern)' (2005:145). She concludes that 'text linguistics' (which, however, is never very clearly-defined) and SFL improve student writing, but the evidence is debatable, as the paper is purely descriptive.

In a study with some parallels with the present one, Lee designed pedagogical materials and collected quantitative and qualitative data. Her results indicated that, following classroom input 'students ... relied less heavily on sequential progressions, and, as a result, they were likely to produce writing which had a clearer topical focus and, hence, was more coherent' (2002:146). However, whether she is referring to constant theme progression here is uncertain: the study does not focus directly on Theme, although it does make reference to Halliday, and explicit reference to Theme and Rheme within the literature review (ibid.:137). The operational definition of coherence (ibid.:139) includes features such as cohesive devices, appropriate information structure and macrostructure, and relations between propositions, but this is slightly vague, and also subjective; it is unclear why these features were chosen or how the 'Coherence Scoring Guide' (ibid.:143), for marking texts, is organised. Lee does not define explicitly how levels of coherence are assessed (or, indeed, what 'coherence' really means). She recommends focussing on specific text types, so that students realise how cohesion functions across genres. Mera Rivas (1999:15) comments that 'effective readers have to be able to understand the relationships between the parts that constitute a text'. Because of this, and in relation to the impetus for the present study, Lee (ibid.:152) sees her own results as encouraging, because 'research has indicated that, in writing ESL students focus almost exclusively on the word and sentence levels rather than the level of the whole discourse.'

Shaw and Liu (1998) reach similar, fairly generalized conclusions: 'impressionistically, both sets of texts were generally coherent' (1998:29). In an experimental study with methodological similarities to the present research (using an essay, but on a repeated topic, for two student groups), they evaluate L2 writing before and after EAP courses. It is difficult to understand exactly what is being measured, however, and despite citing the features of academic writing as those established by Halliday and Hasan (1976), they do

not suggest that their EAP course incorporates specific SFL components. As with Lee (2002) and Storch and Tapper (2009), without a clearer method of defining and determining cohesion, evaluation of the reliability and generalisability of their results is complex.

Hyland asserts that the growth of EAP worldwide has led to 'a lot of work on expository genres of various kinds with an emphasis on the development of topic and argument, features of cohesion and coherence, and pragmatic and interpersonal aspects of language' (2003:167). Nonetheless, contemporary (experimental) research into the pedagogical application of functional language use is still relatively limited, especially within the type of setting described here.

## *2.6 Pedagogical applications and implications*

The texts forming the basis for the present research are required types for both internal and external examining bodies, and with the changes to the university admission and awards systems discussed above, students are likely to face an increase in evaluation of L2 writing in the future. The notion of an 'intuitive concept of 'valued text'', discussed by Bloor and Bloor (2004:219) is connected explicitly and unavoidably to considerations of assessment, an important concern for students and for this study. Evaluating exactly why a text is unclear or difficult to follow can make marking complex and unproductive, with student writing fossilizing due to vague or generalised advice for improvement. For Butt et al. (2001:261) the 'shared language' of SFL 'takes the guesswork out of assessment and eliminates the 'hidden curriculum'.

Within the classroom, teachers also face increased demands on their ability to manage both formative and summative assessment, and to link process and product as smoothly as possible. A text-based approach might facilitate this, as the teaching-learning cycle offers opportunities for ongoing diagnostic assessment associated with each stage. As discussed above, 'target proficiency' is not necessarily homologous with 'native speaker proficiency', and 'good' student texts may, in some cases, make more appropriate models if expert texts constitute a rather unrealistic goal (McDonough, 2005:61). Nonetheless, teachers and students need a clear idea of the characteristics of successful texts. Bloor and Bloor (2004:219) describe recent applied linguistics research in which functional grammar has helped identify and describe the 'precise features of valued texts', citing several studies which have achieved this. Investigating children's writing, Berry found that 'the more successful writers were able to control their thematic choices more consistently than the less successful writers' (cited in Bloor and Bloor, 2004:220) while McCarthy and Carter (also in Bloor and Bloor) show how contrastive thematic structure within the same advertising text affects reader response. Other comparative research has focussed on different textual features, but in general locates theme choice and control as central to reader understanding and engagement.

One of the criticisms levelled at SFL and discussed by Bloor and Bloor (2004) is its reliance upon a more detailed, richer linguistic system, facilitating the identification described above of successful text features but placing new and often unfamiliar demands on teachers and students. Both Hyon (1996) and Hyland (2007) discuss how this increased complexity generates a sharper linguistic focus, which for Butt et al. (2001:205) makes language teaching 'a much less hit-and-miss affair'. Understanding genre enables teachers and students to discuss the relation between form and function and build deeper comprehension of how successful texts work (Bloor and Bloor, 2004, Christie,

1999). Authors such as Burns (2005) and Ellis (2005) emphasise the need for teachers to be well-informed linguistically; SFL incorporates its own metalanguage, a pivotal feature of materials development within the present study, but one comprising 'both a valuable resource and a practical problem' (Butt et al., 2001:261). Tardy (2006:90) cites studies suggesting that genre-based instruction enables some students to develop a metalanguage for discussing texts. Familiarisation with a certain amount of new terminology is prerequisite for learners and teachers, if SFL is used within the classroom, although Carter (cited in Bloor and Bloor, 2004), for example, argues for a less systematic and rigid introduction of metalanguage. Some researchers have explored the implications of this: Hyland (2002b:103) describes a writing course using the SFL model within Australian schools, in which 'the syllabus has been revised to employ more familiar grammar terminology, replacing functional descriptors of clause structure such as *participants*, *processes* and *circumstances* with traditional class terms like *nouns*, *verbs* and *adjectives*', in order to make teachers more comfortable with the material. Martínez Lirola (2006) and Weissberg (1984) also avoid metalanguage. Whether this measure is equally beneficial to students partly depends on their familiarity with grammatical terms; most, if not all, of the EIM students studied languages at school using traditional terminology, but this would not necessarily be the case in all schools nowadays.

Hammond and Macken-Horarik also consider metalanguage; they note that following an initial formal introduction to functional language, students were able to use the metalanguage in ways unpredicted by the teacher, and to analyse texts increasingly independently (1999:541). Scaffolding plays an important part in their methodology, and they suggest that a knowledge of metalanguage works together with discussion of the choices involved in text construction, to develop an increasing capacity for critical analysis. This area of the materials development merited careful consideration. The

teacher and students were encouraged to consider the metalanguage a tool for accessing knowledge and skills, rather than a barrier to understanding.

The application of functional analysis to language teaching and teacher development is discussed by Bloor and Bloor (2004), who cite authors such as Christie and Martin as major contributors to language education research. Martin (2001) compares Themes in child and teenage scripts, and is one of the few authors centring on this aspect of text organisation with younger learners. Linguists such as Carter and McCarthy (cited in Bloor and Bloor, 2004) have argued for a direct application for linguistics in teacher education (*ibid.*), a position supported by Butt *et al.* (2004) who illustrate the practical pedagogical uses of SFL, along with recommendations for teachers. (Unlike Carter and McCarthy, Butt *et al.* advocate a standard metalanguage for classroom use). Painter (2001), Derewianka (2001) and Martin (2001) provide guidance for teachers and ideas for incorporating functional grammar into the classroom. Within curriculum and syllabus design, the implementation of genre pedagogies would normally involve the organisation of learning around a selection of texts, especially within ESP (cf Hyland, 2007), although in an SFL context the work might often be organised thematically (in the traditional sense of the word). To assimilate SFL ideas into a more traditional methodology, a topic-based model would probably be the most viable. The majority of mainstream EFL course books within Britain and Spain adopt a Communicative methodology and are organised on this basis.

Research, then, has tended to be descriptive and it is difficult to locate studies which are comparative or experimental in nature:

although much research, particularly in ESP and Australian systemic functional linguistics, has discussed how genre can be used as a

pedagogical tool, little work has actually investigated the impact of genre-based pedagogy in the classroom.

(Hyon, 1996:714)

Freedman (in Hyon, 1996) suggests that additional studies are needed on ESL reading and writing development, and that we need to consider carefully the grounds we have for believing that genres enhance learning, before teaching them. Ultimately, any improvement in student writing which is attributed to a particular methodology or classroom practice needs to be evaluated within the context of viable alternatives; much of the literature focuses on classroom practice informed by and developed through a theoretical knowledge of a text-based approach, but fails to demonstrate how these improvements might be reliably measured against alternative methodologies. The present study begins from this point, and against the background outlined above aims to contribute to our understanding of student writing, through the exploration of both the theoretical and practical implications of a focus on Thematic structure within an EFL classroom. The research questions emerged from professional practice and from the literature discussed here:

***How significant is awareness of thematic structure in creating a coherent text in L1 and L2?***

***What implication does a focus on thematic structure have for L2 teaching methods highlighting isolated language features?***

The L2 students participating in the study are working at intermediate and advanced level, and the L1 texts will serve as an initial point of comparison for the L2 texts. The aim

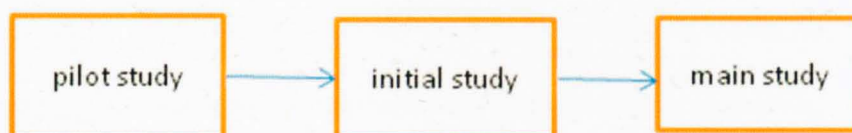
is for the 'awareness' referred to in the first question to be explored through student writing at the beginning and end of the course, and highlighted and developed through the use of classroom materials written for the research. The 'isolated language features' of the second question are those such as the 'linkers' (*firstly, secondly, however, for example*), and other decontextualised lexical items which may be presented in lists as part of a speaking and/or writing task in many EFL course books and exam preparation material.



# Chapter 3: methodology

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The research consisted of 3 interlinked and inter-dependent stages. The E835 pilot study fed into the design of the initial study, which in turn fed into the main study:



## 3.1 Part 1: Data description and analysis

Each stage incorporated text analyses, built around the identification of the following Theme types and progression patterns.

### 3.1.1 Topical Themes

The so-called topical Theme in any clause is the first constituent that is part of the meaningful structure of the clause ... (it) always represents a Participant, Circumstance or Process ... the topical Theme is always realized by one of the following elements: Subject (S), Predicator (P), Complement (C), or circumstantial Adjunct (A).

(Bloor and Bloor, 2004:72)

It is where the analysis begins, with choices here forming the basis of the pre- and post-test comparisons.

In my opinion	the method of assessment in Spain	is very awful (level 3)
Interpersonal	Topical	
THEME		RHEME

Within a Thematic progression analysis, Butt et al. (2001:143) define ‘predominant Themes’ as the Topical Thematic choices used most consistently within a text. Differences emerged here between native and non-native speakers in the initial study. In the main study the analysis of Topical Themes was further refined to include more detailed divisions of Marked Theme.

3.1.2 Textual Themes

These are the ‘linkers’ taught in EFL classrooms, ‘traditionally called signposts because of the work they do in shaping and restructuring texts’ (Butt et al., 2001:152). They are normally Continuity Adjuncts and Conjunctive Adjuncts (Eggins, 2004). Conjunctions such as *if, although, unless, and because*, commonly introduce dependent clauses in discursive texts, and Conjunctive Adjuncts such as *therefore, nevertheless, in addition, and finally*, can also be thematic in initial clause position (Butt et al.:ibid.). Halliday (1967:221) comments that items such as *however, nevertheless, perhaps, and probably* ‘favour initial position but are not restricted to it; and this suggests that they are thematic when occurring initially.’

*First of all, the work the students do during the course* is usually homework, *so they* can prepare it properly at home (CAE)

so	they	can prepare it
Textual	Topical	
THEME		RHEME

Initial study results suggested an important role in text construction for these Themes, which were used more by non-native than native speakers. This coincides with the original hypothesis, which posits differences between how native and non-native speakers organize and give coherence to texts and relates these differences to Theme choices, especially Textual Themes. Lock (1996:230) asserts that Textual Themes need careful classroom attention, as ‘learners often have a repertoire of a few such Adjuncts which they overuse’, while Hyland (2006:61) cites research using learner corpora (frequency counts) showing that expressions such as *first of all, on the other hand, in my opinion*, are overused in L2 student texts. Shaw and Liu (1998) also comment that over teaching has generated excessive use of connectors. The classroom materials here focus on ways of building texts relying less on Textual Themes and more on other Thematic devices employed by native speakers.

### 3.1.3 Interpersonal Themes

Modal Adjuncts such as *probably* or *perhaps* (Mood Adjuncts) or *frankly* or *fortunately* (Comment Adjuncts) constitute Interpersonal Theme if they precede the Topical Theme

(cf Bloor and Bloor, 2004), and they express speaker interaction or position (cf Butt et al., 2001:138).

**in a class of master** the final exam can be interesting *because* usually the students are working (level 3)

In my opinion, **not so much weight** should be put on a final exam, *because* frequently **this** turns out very stressful for students (CAE)

<i>because</i>	usually	the students are working
<i>because</i>	frequently	this
Conjunctive Adjunct	Modal Adjunct	Subject
Textual	Interpersonal	Topical
THEME		

Butt et al. (2001) comment that native speakers are more likely to use Modal Finites to express position within an argument, while non-native texts rely more on Modal and Comment Adjuncts as Theme.

3.1.4 Marked Themes

The unmarked choice for Theme is Subject, but the Theme slot can be filled by other elements:

If the initial element in the clause does not function as Subject or Complement or CIRCUMSTANTIAL Adjunct (this concept ... embraces all

Adjuncts **other than** conjunctive and modal ones), then the Subject, Complement or Adjunct next following is still part of the Theme.

(Halliday, 1985:53)

Thompson (2004) suggests there may be contextual reasons why Adjuncts or Complements are Theme and, indeed, textual coherence is often created through these particular choices (cf Butt et al., 2001). Marked Themes in this study are mainly adverbial groups and prepositional phrases functioning as Circumstantial Adjuncts and contributing to the experiential meaning (cf Bloor and Bloor, 2004, Thompson, 2004). Dependent clauses in Thematic position, providing circumstantial information, offer another Marked option at clause level. 'Thematised Comment' (see section 3.6.1) was analysed as Marked Theme, in the main study.

### ***3.1.5 Thematic progression***

Thematic progression can unfold in various ways: the following are used in the text analyses and classroom materials:

**Constant Theme pattern** (repeating or referring to the same Theme over several clauses)

**Linear Theme pattern** (incorporating the Rheme from one clause into the Theme of the next)

**Split Rheme Pattern** (using different components from the Rheme of the first clause in turn as Theme for subsequent clauses)

### 3.2 Part 2: Research study structure

**Table 3.1** The 3 stages of the research

	<i>Pilot study</i>	<i>Initial study</i>	<i>Main research</i>
<i>participants</i>	2 groups: 3 non-native EFL teachers, 3 native teachers.	2 groups: 10 native speakers, 10 non-native EFL students.	2 experimental and 2 control groups: intermediate and CAE. 1 experimental level 4, contributing qualitative information only.
<i>Qualitative data</i>	Semi-structured interview, online questionnaires. (Questionnaires analysed qualitatively due to restricted amount of data).	no	Questionnaires, written and oral teacher feedback.
<i>Quantitative data</i>	6 discursive compositions	10 non-native and 10 native speaker discursive compositions	Pre-test and post-test discursive compositions.
<i>Research focus</i>	Approaches to discursive writing.	Textual features and organisation.	Textual features and organisation, especially Theme and Rheme.
<i>Text analysis</i>	Compositions analysed for number and type of links and Theme choice. Division of Themes into specific types proved uninformative, due to lack of data.	Comparison of native and non-native Theme type and progression choices. Categories for main study clarified.	Compositions analysed in detail, focussing especially on Theme and Rheme. Pre- and post-test Theme type and progression choices compared.
<i>Ethical issues</i>	Subject reactivity among native	Growing researcher awareness of	Teacher and student roles as

	speakers; insecurity and doubt about writing compositions.	ethical issues: how to achieve coherence and clarity in the overall design, so that participants understand, enjoy and benefit from research process.	participants and teacher responsibility clearly set out at beginning of research.
<b>Results</b>	Differences between non-native and native texts in area of Theme and Rheme.	Differences between non-native and native texts in area of Theme and Rheme. New categories emerge showing differences, e.g. Theme Predication, Thematised Comment.	Use of materials (designed around a text-based approach) affects Theme type and progression choices, especially e.g. in Interpersonal Themes and Cross-referential progression.
<b>Implications</b>	A functional model of text analysis, focussing on Theme and Rheme, is a viable research topic.	Data classification methods, analytical procedure OK for main study. Materials development informed by results (e.g. over-reliance on Textual Themes, importance of Interpersonal meaning).	Awareness of Thematic choice and progression can help create cohesive texts: SFL concepts can contribute positively to teaching-learning process.

### 3.2.1 E835 (*Educational Research in Action*) pilot study

This study, looking at how native (NS) and non-native (NNS) speakers approached discursive writing, anticipated the first stage of the main research. It involved 6 texts, 3 from native-speakers and 3 from non-native.

Native speakers were used as a baseline for comparison for non-native speaker texts. These native speakers were academic writers, in the sense that they were mostly (in the initial study) teachers, and so familiar with the type of task they were asked to do, even if they themselves were not used to writing frequently. It was recognized that while the authors were not necessarily 'good' writers simply because they were native speakers, the texts would provide the researcher with a detailed example of patterns and tendencies which might be missing from the non-native texts, and which could generate clues as to the lack of cohesion or comprehensibility of some non-native writing. Hyland (2002b:123) comments that 'L2 writers need to know what is typical rather than what is possible'. For this reason, the texts for the initial stage of the research were deliberately chosen as reflecting the writing strategies and skills of those involved in working with the students in the classroom, rather than from more remote or unfamiliar sources.

Studies from contrastive rhetoric which have examined academic writing have highlighted different conventions across languages (cf Paltridge, 2004:118), and it was felt that the native speaker texts would illustrate and perhaps clarify some of these areas of difference. Hyland (2003:168-169) argues for the need to recognize that 'there is no single, self-evident, and non-contestable literacy, as dominant ideologies suggest, but a wide variety of practices relevant for particular times and purposes': he suggests replacing 'the native versus non-native writer distinction' with one 'emphasizing the variable expertise of novices and experts in particular contexts'. In spite of this, however,



a baseline for comparison is necessary, in order to identify those areas where native and non-native texts do diverge, and for teachers to be able to focus upon these areas when teaching writing. It is also important that students are aware of this aspect of language use, and that they are able to understand where their own texts differ from the native speaker models. Paltridge (2004) comments that:

When speakers from different countries and cultures interact, more than one set of social and cultural norms and assumptions are at work. Information and argument, for example, are organized differently in different cultures. The meaning behind different speech acts varies. There are also cultural differences in the ways different genres are spoken and written in different languages and cultures.

(Paltridge, 2004:117-118)

Data was collected from 2 sample groups: non-native and native speakers. All respondents were teachers, establishing some homogeneity, and sampling was both theoretical and convenience-based. Non-native speakers were drawn from an upper-intermediate level EFL class of 12 teachers employed in mainstream Spanish primary and secondary education, and access to the school of technology holding the classes was negotiated through the class teacher. Efforts were made to minimise the disruption to teacher and learners by ensuring that the task fitted naturally into the syllabus.

Some of the native-speakers initially approached were reluctant to participate, and were finally discounted after a reasonable period of waiting. This led to the collaboration of a mainstream teacher. The other two teachers were EFL teachers, working in Barcelona.

The compositions were the main source of data. The teacher provided the researcher with a list of topics discussed during the course, from which one was selected. The (sealed) essay title was given to the teacher, who administered the test during class time, and carried out the task herself. The researcher chose three scripts for analysis: although randomly selected, two were rejected beforehand due to legibility problems, introducing an element of exclusion. The other native-speaker respondents received the title online. They were asked not to open the task until the time of writing, to recreate conditions imposed upon non-native speakers.

Qualitative data came from a semi-structured interview with one native-speaker respondent (the class teacher). The two others were unavailable for interview and were sent short questionnaires online with the material adjusted slightly for the mainstream teacher. Only one was returned.

Native and non-native texts showed distinct preferences regarding text organisation, especially concerning Theme and Rheme. Whereas the use of parallel linking was comparable, cross-referential linking was more restricted in non-native texts. Differences also emerged in predominant Themes, an area potentially influencing textual coherence and accessibility (Er, 2001). Questionnaire feedback from two native speaker teachers judged distinguishing features of discursive texts to be *'linkers rather than grammar'* and *'the basic sort of linking devices – providing that, as long as'*. Neither respondent commented on structural or semantic features which might be associated with Theme-Rheme organisation, and both emphasised discrete language items rather than overall textual structure. Operationalising the independent variable in terms of native or non-native produced two very broad categories; confining the native speaker group to EFL teachers would have controlled for more outside variables, and this change was adopted

in the initial study. The qualitative data clarified native speaker understanding of the determining features of this text type, providing information about differences between non-native and native speakers (cf Hyland, 2003) and supporting triangulation as a means of illuminating the individual writing process. Nonetheless, results were in many ways inconclusive, because of the restricted sample size.

Although the pilot study was very much influenced by the context and the resources available, it established a functional model of text analysis with specific focus on Theme and Rheme as a viable and relevant research topic. The findings therefore validated the research questions explored in the initial study, and suggested areas which could be analysed with more data, such as Thematic progression.

### ***3.2.2 The initial study***

Twelve compositions were obtained from native speaker participants and ten randomly selected for analysis. All but two of the ten native speakers whose compositions were used were teachers. Nine were living and working in Barcelona, and those who were teaching were either working as EFL teachers or teaching in international schools. One participant was teaching in England. All were known to the researcher, either as ex-colleagues or friends or acquaintances, and all volunteered to participate in the research.

The participants were told that the study concerned NS and NNS differences, but there is no reason to believe that the idea of this type of comparison influenced the writing: as teachers they were all familiar with the concept of NS and NNS divergence, and would have discussed the idea many times within both work and training contexts.

The non-native discursive compositions were written by EIM students for an internal end-of-course exam, and had already been marked. Probability sampling was employed: the coordinator selected scripts which were reasonably representative, in terms of scores, for this level across the EIM. From the original sixteen, the researcher chose ten for analysis, through a process of non-probability (random) sampling (cf Burgess et al., 2007).

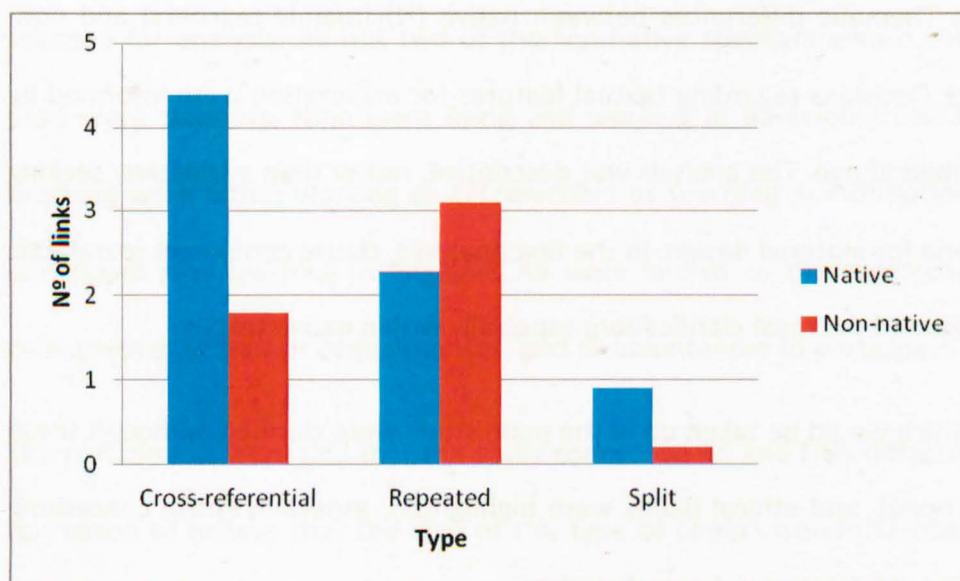
Changes from the pilot study directly affecting native-speaker sampling included the decision not to restrict this group to teachers, initially because of practical considerations, but also because there seemed to be no theoretical or methodological reason to exclude other native-speakers. Convenience sampling (Cohen *et al.* 2006:102) was used, giving less control of outside variables, but potentially a wider range of writing styles. And, with wider implications for data-gathering, the decision was taken not to use questionnaires with this group because at this stage of the research the focus was on textual features and organisation.

The organisation and categorisation of the initial study data within an SFL framework concentrated on Thematic differences between native (N) (mainly teachers) and non-native (NN) texts. Decisions regarding textual features for exploration were informed by categories described above. The analysis was descriptive, rather than evaluative, seeking to establish criteria for material design. In the text analyses, clause complexes (paratactic or hypotactic) required the most clarification, especially within native texts.

The categories which would be taken up in the main study were clarified (although these were later developed), and ethical issues were highlighted, especially those concerning the need for clarity of information for participants.

### 3.2.2.1 Thematic progression results

As in the pilot study, non-native texts exhibited fewer incidences of cross-referential linking, and much less success at handling them. An 'unsuccessful' attempt is defined as where textual progression and so coherence is impaired by an attempt to relate the Rheme and Theme of consecutive clauses. Results showed the mean number of cross-referential links per text as 4.4 for native speakers and 1.8 for non-natives, not including unsuccessful attempts. If these are included, the non-native mean is 2.8. For repeated Themes, the positions were reversed, with a mean of 2.3 per native speaker text and 3.1 for non-native. For split or multiple Themes, the native and non-native speaker means were 0.9 and 0.2 respectively. Results for Theme progression show differences between native and non-native strategies: non-native speakers relied more on repeated Themes to advance the argument, while native speakers used more cross-referential Themes, and managed them more successfully.

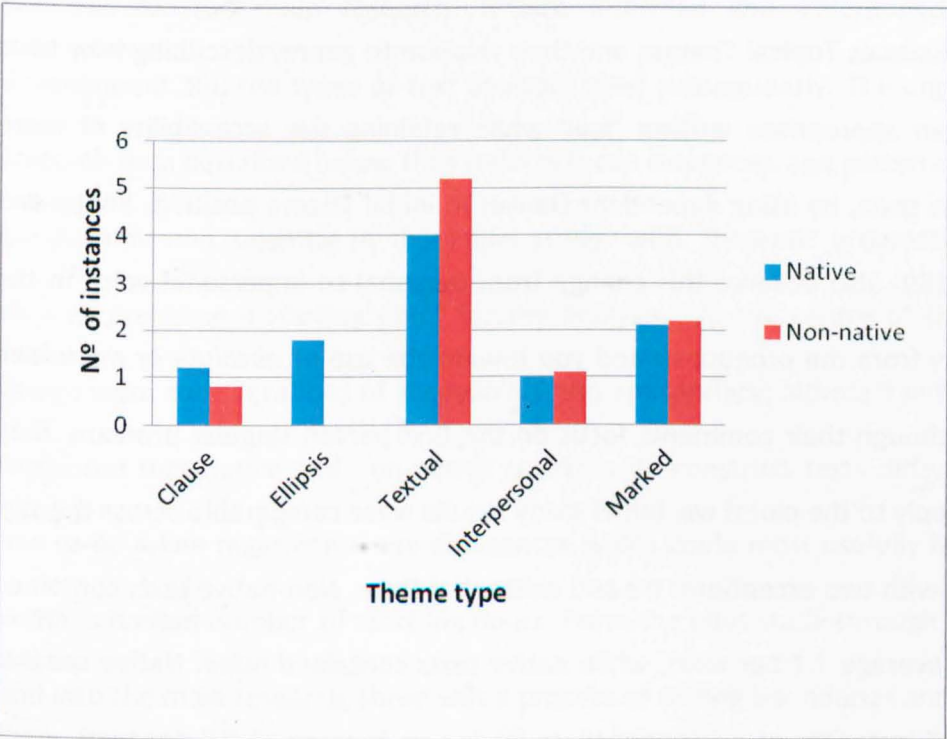


**Figure 3.1** Theme progression: comparison of native and non-native speaker writing samples from initial study

This area was explored more fully in the main study, and was a focus for lesson 7 of the classroom materials.

3.2.2.2 Theme type results

Differences also emerged with predominant Themes, an area potentially influencing textual coherence and accessibility. The L2 texts used more Textual Themes than the native speaker texts, similar numbers of Interpersonal and Marked Themes, and fewer clauses as Themes.



**Figure 3.2** Theme type: comparison of native and non-native speaker writing samples from initial study

For more detailed results for Theme type see Appendix 1.

Textual Theme results connected most directly with the original hypothesis, suggesting an important role in text construction, but, interestingly, more frequent use by non-native than native speakers. There were implications here for the materials, because the impetus for the study was the notion of an over-reliance in course books on these language features.

Theme type results also indicated where native and non-native texts might be diverging, raising interest in the interpersonal area of meaning, developed later in the main study. Differences in Marked Themes, such as more *clauses* as Theme in native speaker texts, for example, seemed to merit further exploration, as illustrating the notion of choice.

Egins (2004) discusses Topical Themes and their relation to genre, describing how texts might capture an appropriate written 'feel' while retaining the accessibility of more informal, spoken texts, by using dependent clauses in initial Theme position. Knapp and Watkins (2005:189) also observe this change from personal to impersonal voice in the movement away from the pronouns *I* and *you* toward the use of *absolute* or *modalised* statements. Although their comments focus on the first person singular pronoun, they might equally apply to the plural *we*. Initial study results were comparable across the two groups of texts, with two exceptions: *we* and existential *there*. Non-native texts contained 11 uses of *we* (average 1.1 per text), while native texts contained none. Native speaker texts exhibited 5 instances of existential *there* (giving an average of 0.5 per text), while non-native texts contained no instances. Peters (personal communication, March 2009) suggests that this might represent a transitional stage on the continuum between 'I' and 'you' and the impersonal. Martin (2001:222) defines the transformation of spoken texts into expositions as 'a movement from what Christie and Rothery (1989) call judgments – a

movement from personal feelings and their motivation to public positions and their rationale'. If the above in combination generate the appropriate interpersonal and experiential distance (cf Eggins, 2004) associated with the mode and genre being described, then differences between the two sample groups are relevant. Although the main study did not focus on these language items, the whole area of interpersonal meaning emerged gradually as an important area for exploration.

### ***3.2.2.3 Overall***

In summary, the initial study clarified data classification methods and established priorities for the main research. It also informed and determined the materials development and the types of text analyses used subsequently. The organisation of the research data described below thus reflects those categories and patterns emerging most consistently and saliently in the initial study, with Thematic progression and Theme choices providing a starting point for the analysis. At the centre of the experimental design were considerations of accessibility and appropriacy; although initial study results suggested that native and non-native speakers do construct texts differently, decisions had to be taken regarding those differences which could most usefully be focused upon within a limited number of teaching hours. From the pilot study through the initial study and into the main research, there was a process of setting boundaries and isolating those areas of interest within the framework of SFL which would address the main research questions without resulting in an overly generalised study of cohesion and discursive writing.



### *3.2.3 The main study*

Information outlining the research (Appendix 2) was sent to all EIM teachers, following initial meetings with the co-ordinators. Two teachers expressed interest in participating, subject to the September allocation of groups. It was difficult for teachers to commit to the project without first seeing the materials, and the decision was made to proceed with the materials development without knowing definitely who would participate. It was assumed that the groups would be intermediate or upper intermediate, the most common EIM levels, and the materials design followed these criteria. Ultimately, the levels were slightly different, and only one teacher participated.

The teaching phase was planned for the 2009 autumn term or the 2010 spring term, depending on student group availability for participating teachers. It eventually took place over both terms, with data from all groups collected in the form of compositions at the beginning and end of the teaching-learning cycle. The pre-test compositions were marked by the researcher and returned to the students. The researcher retained copies for the text analyses, and initial processing and data analysis began at this point. The compositions were later incorporated into several lessons of the teaching-learning cycle (Appendix 3). The experimental groups also completed questionnaires (Appendix 4) after the teaching phase.

The overall research design remained relatively unchanged from the initial proposal, although there were modifications, primarily with data collection. One of these concerned the pre-test of the original proposal, timetabled for January–April 2009, and planned for use with the student group who would later participate in the teaching phase. As part of the initial study, it was conceived as a method of level assessment and an indicator of features for inclusion in the materials. The students would have gone on

to participate in the teaching-learning cycle in the autumn term (Sept-Dec 2009), completing an end-of-term post-test.

It proved impossible, however, to determine so far in advance which groups would continue together after the summer, and which teachers would be assigned specific levels. Therefore, copies of level 4 (intermediate) exam scripts from the previous year, from students uninvolved in the main research, were used for text analyses in the initial study, and the pre-test delayed until September. Permission was given by the co-ordinators, as the scripts were considered university property.

The immediate availability of the exam scripts brought the materials development phase forward. Practical difficulties of collecting data so long before the teaching phase were avoided, as was the potential compromise of continuity and reliability through group composition changes. The adjustments assumed that the discursive compositions in the initial study comprised features and tendencies typical of intermediate student texts. The pre-test in October 2009 therefore served exclusively to assess writing level before the teaching input, rather than as a basis for materials development, as originally planned. The increased time available for materials design and for the teacher to assimilate new ideas and discuss the materials with the researcher is judged to have impacted positively on the research, relieving some potential pressure at the beginning of term.

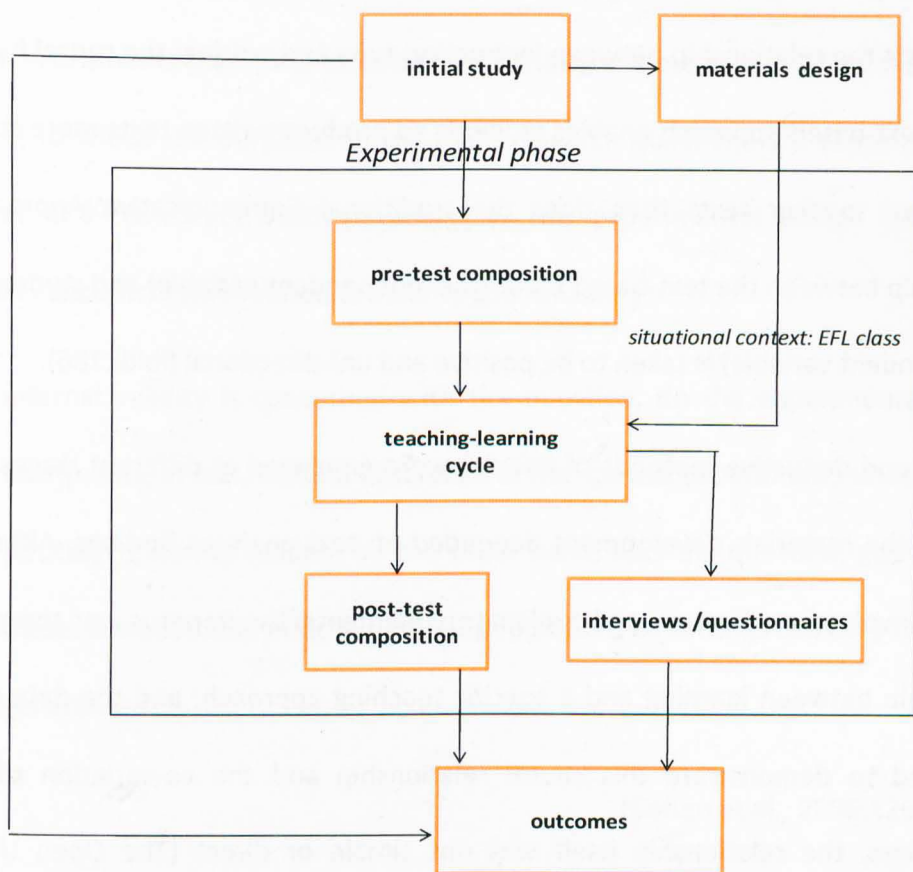
Other modifications, discussed in section 3.5, below, concerned the group levels participating in the research.

A research diary facilitated reflexivity, bringing together teacher and researcher perspectives. Thoughts upon choices and decisions made during the research were recorded, together with teacher feedback and emerging ideas from ongoing reading.

### ***3.3 Part 3: Research design***

#### ***3.3.1 Methodology and methods***

Underlying and validating research method choices are methodologies (cf Burgess et al., 2007), and among the different educational research paradigms and traditions, the present study seems to fit most comfortably with post-positivism (ibid.:54). This research tradition proposes that although knowledge might be fallible, some insights and understandings are nonetheless more likely to be true than others, and recognises that while absolutes are difficult to establish, objectivity is achievable and desirable. The combination and mutual complementarity of 'qualitative' (non-numerical) and 'quantitative' (numerical) data collection and analysis associated with this research type are features of the present investigation, the model of which is primarily quantitative, with some qualitative material. Quantitative methods indicate changes before and after tests, with qualitative methods describing the nature of these changes (The Open University, 2003a). Burgess et al. (ibid.) comment that most current educational research draws on a mixture of methods. Embedded within the main methodology (the experimental phase) are other mutually compatible methodologies, such as the teaching-learning cycle and the qualitative interview and questionnaire (cf Cohen et al., 2006). Classification is sometimes problematic, though, partly because of this mixing of methods. The research comprises both the context-based, individual experiences and specificity of case-based, idiographic research but also aspects of the generalising, positivist stance (cf Burgess et al., 2007).



**Figure 3.3** The Research Design

Cohen et al. identify eight main research styles, including ‘experiments, quasi-experiments and single-case research’ (2006:211), a category incorporating this study. The experimental design saw the teaching approach operationalised in terms of a teaching-learning cycle, and the dependent variable in terms of a writing task, involving experimental and control classes. The pre-test–post-test methodology mirrors that of Gibbons and Marwick-Smith in a (1992) study exploring modality, with SFL as the basis for an instructional cycle.

The research design incorporates a hypothetico-deductive method, wherein a hypothesis is derived from a theory and then subjected to test (Burgess et al., *ibid.*). Instrument choice relates directly to earlier decisions concerning the research type, here

experimental (cf Cohen et al. 2006). The case-selection strategy (The Open University, 2003a) tests the relationship between instruction-type and writing; the causal hypothesis is that a text-based approach enables students to produce written texts more consistent with native speaker texts than does the traditional Communicative Approach. The relationship between the text-based input (the independent variable) and student writing (the dependent variable) is taken to be positive and uni-directional (ibid.:186).

Inductive and deductive methods of enquiry were employed at different stages (cf Bird, 1992), as the materials development depended on text analyses findings. Although the research involved exploratory and explanatory elements, the impetus was the predicted relationship between learning and a specific teaching approach, and the data collected were used to demonstrate this causal relationship and the co-variation of factors. Nevertheless, the relationship itself was not simple or direct (The Open University, 2003a), and evidence from triangulation contextualised the quantitative data, facilitating 'a spiral of understanding' (ibid.:99). Qualitative information from questionnaires and oral and written teacher feedback provided the framework for interpreting the quantitative results; direct references in this qualitative feedback to textual organisation were compared to theoretical ideas outlined in the literature review above and explored in the text analyses.

'The aim of methodology is to help us understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific enquiry, but the process itself' (Cohen et al., 2006:45). The approach is in many ways ethnographic; despite the experimental design, the emphasis is on the exploration and description of educational phenomena, together with the testing of hypotheses or measurement. The learning *process*, defined in terms of student response to classroom input, as well as the *outcomes*, is therefore foregrounded. Nonetheless,

measurement of change or effect is complex, depending on the compatibility of the data collection instruments (here, the classroom materials), the methods of data analysis, and the extent to which the purposes of the main research questions are captured in both (Cohen et al.'s 'construct validity', 2006:85). The experimental design itself brings associated concerns, some related to validity and reliability:

internal validity is concerned with the question, do the experimental treatments, in fact, make a difference in the specific experiments under scrutiny? External validity, on the other hand, asks the question, given these demonstrable effects, to what populations or settings can they be generalised?

(Cohen et al., 2006:126)

The research might describe relationships between variables, for example, without proving that the associations are causal (cf Richardson, 2000). It was always possible that increased attention to the writing process would engender overall improvement, but that control of Theme and Rheme would be mainly unaffected or that any slight changes would result from the side effect of some other variable. Alternatively, 'the *lack* of any effect may be due to interference from other factors' (ibid.:34).

Internal validity might also be compromised if the pre-test (the first composition) sensitised students to the experimental purpose, generating higher scores (or, in this case, significant differences) in the post-test. The pre-test design aimed to control for this effect by employing a familiar task and not referring directly to the language features under investigation. Richardson (ibid.) also comments that the experimental situation should reflect as far as possible the real-life context, in this case the normal classroom situation. This 'non-equivalent control group design' (Cohen et al., 2006:212) used already

existing groups, organised primarily by level. To maximise reliability and validity both groups had the same teacher, thus controlling for diversity of teaching styles. The random allocation of control and experimental group sought to hold constant other variables, so that any differences in results should be attributable uniquely to the experimental variable. Nonetheless, factors did emerge indicating differences between the groups, and these are clarified at the analysis stage. Although Cohen et al. link generalisation and external validity in the quotation above, Burgess et al. (2007) argue that generalizing findings is difficult with any group (such as a class) not formed specifically for research purposes. The relevance of results to professional practice and applicability to comparable settings rather than a wider generalisability, was the main concern here (cf Open University, 2003a:133, 'naturally occurring situations are very rarely shaped so as to lend themselves easily to research'). Nonetheless, findings might still contribute to theoretical and practical debates, or trigger new lines of argument within research. The balance between limiting the scope of the research questions so that the data collected would be appropriate and sufficiently detailed, and ensuring that the research, although in many ways context-specific, would yield results applicable to other situations, was an important design consideration.

### ***3.3.2 The participants***

The teacher was British, and had worked in the setting for nearly twenty years, including a period as co-ordinator. He was studying at doctorate level at the time of the research, and was working also as a teacher trainer. His experience therefore was wider and his level of academic qualifications higher than many of the teachers working in the EIM. This profile was anticipated to generate a wider vision of where the materials might fit into

courses and future opportunities for their use. Although the teacher was not sufficiently representative of all EIM teachers to make unconditional generalisation a valid concept, the research aimed to be relevant and useful in some way to all staff, with findings applicable to classroom practice and possibly future research and teacher training, areas where the teacher was himself involved.

EIM students generally come from a variety of degree courses, although in each group the majority usually represent the faculty where the EFL class is held. There may also be external students and/or older people employed in university administrative or teaching posts, but most are undergraduates working toward end-of-course internal exams and sometimes external Cambridge exams. Some groups follow specific Cambridge exam courses (FCE, CAE and Proficiency) or EAP courses, such as English for students of Biology, Pharmacy or Law. (These EAP courses are not offered on a regular basis throughout the year, but may be timetabled as summer intensive courses, depending on student demand and teacher interest). The student groups for the research included two CAE groups and two level 3 (intermediate) groups, from several faculties. Around 90% were undergraduates (aged between eighteen and twenty-two) from Economics, Pharmacy, Chemistry or Law, and they were at different stages of their degree courses. The others were lecturers or administrative staff employed at the university. All were native Catalan or Spanish speakers. One level 4 (upper intermediate) group participated in the teaching-learning cycle, and contributed qualitative but not quantitative data.



### ***3.3.3 Teacher-Researcher relationship and roles***

The methodological decisions and procedures described here were taken and followed within a research design context in which the researcher was the outsider and the teacher both the vehicle for the practical application of the data gathering instruments and the link with student participants. Although teacher and researcher roles were thus clearly defined, the nature of the relationship was not static; for the teacher, the balance between subject knowledge and teacher knowledge (cf Burgess et al. 2007) was altered and probably uncomfortable and uncertain initially. Curriculum cycle theory describes a much more interventionist teacher role (Hyland, 2002) than Communicative methodology and contemporary teacher training courses, where the teacher is a facilitator rather than instructor (cf Knapp and Watkins, 2005). As insider, the teacher had direct access to student responses; his own feelings influenced student reaction to the methodology, and he became increasingly confident with the material. Mercer (2004:16) comments that 'there can be no progress without some acceptance of the legitimacy and the value of activities by both teachers and learners': this entailed a balance between modifying materials following feedback and maintaining those features which ensured appropriate data was gathered.

The role of the teacher was central and fundamental to the design and viability of the project. Had the researcher been working at the EIM during the research, the participation of another teacher may not have been contemplated. Ultimately, though, this methodological feature proved valuable and thought-provoking, if not always comfortable for the researcher. It demanded ongoing and careful consideration of the day-to-day practical application of the materials to the classroom within the context of

teacher and student responses, in a way that might have been easier to avoid and certainly less objective, if researcher and teacher roles were fused.

There were, nonetheless, aspects of the classroom materials which provoked criticism from the teacher, and this negativity may have been transmitted to students. Researcher-teacher meetings highlighted the need to clarify the focus of each research stage, and to reflect upon the amount of information which could be understood and retained as the teaching progressed. Materials deriving from an intense and protracted period of reading and consideration were familiar and understandable to the researcher, but were less so to those not immediately involved in their development. Problematic sections were dealt with as they arose, and discussed within the context of the completed teaching phase in the final feedback session, toward the end of the research. The process was one of learning for all participants, and was recognised as such by the teacher.

Teachers often have little say in the materials they use, and it was hoped that this researcher-teacher collaboration would generate curiosity and interest, and provide the teacher with a 'voice' (Carr and Kemmis, cited in Cohen et al., 2006:31). The teaching phase was designed to provide valuable contextual information for the data analysis: critical reflection on the data gathering process in later chapters considers teacher stance and interpretation of the materials.

### ***3.3.4 Ethical considerations***

As an ex-teacher (I left the EIM in 2004), my researcher role was outsider, but with insider knowledge of courses, the internal structure of the school, and demands on teachers. I had previously worked with the teacher, initially while he was Director of Studies, and

later as teaching colleagues. Access to teachers, students, and documentation materials in the form of exam scripts, was authorized by the EIM Academic Director and the English Coordinators: the provision of explicit and reliable information to participants, and the establishment of mutual understanding of expectations, aims and timetabling were researcher commitments. All participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 5) and students were assured that the research was unrelated to course assessment, with anonymity an option. The status of anecdotal data obtained informally during the research process from teacher-researcher discussions, was agreed upon; any data of this type used in the report would be clarified first with the teacher.

A preliminary consideration of the ethical issues arising from the initial study clarifies some of the decisions taken subsequently. The native speaker participants were told that the research focus was upon differences between native and non-native texts, not on individual writing skills, but despite this reassurance the process still generated insecurity and doubt. The full extent of these misgivings had not been predicted and indeed was not wholly alleviated by the researcher. These issues concerning respondent perception of the researcher role and more general attitudes towards research (perhaps most obviously, distrust) contributed to greater consideration of participant role and reaction in the initial presentation of the main study to participants (Appendix 2).

This process also raised questions as to how collaboration could be encouraged. The native speaker group received no tangible benefit from the initial study, for example, and the question of 'ownership' of the research (Cohen et al., 2006:84) has real implications here. It was therefore decided that offering participants access to the teaching materials (perhaps incorporating examples of their own writing) after the experiment might stimulate involvement and generate feelings of a stake in the findings (cf Open University,

2001:13), and this was done in the main study. The decision was also taken to use questionnaires again (as in the pilot study), because although the initial study interview yielded interesting data, few points of comparison were available and it remained an isolated source of information. The emphasis in the main study was therefore upon a more comprehensive assessment and inclusion of qualitative information, as bias might more easily affect analysis and interpretation when data is limited, especially if results coincide broadly with researcher expectations and values.

The random assignation of classes to either treatment or control group was a further ethical consideration (The Open University, 2003b) and was carried out in consultation with the teacher. This level of physical control of variables was considered appropriate as no final exam or written evaluation would be affected by the experiment (cf Open University, 2003b). The aim was always to offer the control group future use of the materials, if the experimental group post-test compositions were markedly better than those of the control group, and students were informed of this provision in advance. Most EIM courses are 120 hours, 4 hours (2 classes) a week, although some are structured slightly differently, and the CAE control group (but *not* the experimental group) was timetabled for 4 hours, once a week. This introduced other variables potentially influencing results, such as irregular attendance and tiredness, leading to a lack of concentration and motivation. These are examples of factors outside researcher or teacher control potentially affecting a 4-hour Friday evening class.

All students received a letter outlining their potential role in the research, and it was made clear that some would be participating as the control group, while others would form the experimental group. They were therefore aware of each other, and of their different roles. In all cases, the participants received extensive notes and corrections for

the compositions they produced, a process intended to increase motivation equally, across the groups. The offer of future use of the materials to the control groups also aimed to develop a feeling of inclusiveness. While an awareness of participation in the research would have impacted more on the experimental groups (and mainly positively, from the questionnaire feedback), there is no reason to suppose that the control groups were affected negatively. Indeed, a heightened awareness on the part of the teacher of the writing process, through the use of the materials and participation in the research, may have benefitted all groups.

The research was intended to be both exploratory and predictive, with no evaluation or judgement of individual teaching style or ability involved, and this was emphasised to the teacher. It was intended that the process might empower both students and teachers; that they should see their participation as active, informative and valuable, and as contributing positively to their future academic and professional development. The choice of methods and approaches sought to exemplify ethical responsibility and raised questions of reliability and validity (Burgess et al., 2007). These considerations affected in all ways the research design, from the collection and analysis (and subsequent dissemination) of data to the research relationships making this possible. It was expected that the researcher's personal stance and preferences in relation to this process should be made transparent throughout, especially as the research itself broadened and deepened. Efforts were made to ensure that the status of the work was consistently 'visible and open to suggestions' (Open University, 2003b:138), and the research procedure itself binding and transparent through 'reflection, amendment, adjustment and refinement' (Burgess et al., 2007:41).

### ***3.4 Part 4: Materials construction (the instrument for data collection)***

An example lesson and the introductions to the teacher and student notes are reproduced in Appendix 6, and a list of all provided teaching materials in the final appendix (Appendix 19). Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 include short extracts from the materials.

#### ***3.4.1 Overall design***

Designed by the researcher, but taught by the class teacher, the materials needed to be clear and accessible. Detailed guidance for their use was provided in the teacher and student materials, so that key research theories and concepts were comprehensible and all participants understood clearly the direction and purpose. The construction and focus linked to text-based teaching theory, but depended practically on data emerging from text comparisons. Burgess et al. (2007:47) suggest that where the literature around the research question is 'relatively underdeveloped', this type of inductive approach is appropriate. Although here it is the design of methodological materials rather than the construction of theoretical models which is under discussion, the two are considered mutually dependent. The researcher's EFL teaching experience and training was mainly developed within a Communicative methodology, a context familiar also to the research participants. 'Often what attracts people to one published theory rather than another is its close match with their own personal ideas and assumptions' (The Open University, 2003a:139), and pedagogical and personal theories based on previous experience were bound to influence behaviour and perceptions and also responses to the research.

The theoretical and pedagogical constructs underlying the research come together in the translation of ideas from SFL into classroom materials. The aim was to combine as easily and naturally as possible theory with practice, with both seen as mutually insightful and beneficial. An attempt was made to keep the research questions and rationale consistently in view, and to consider systematically the theoretical and pedagogical implications of choices made. Some of these choices were revised or adjusted in line with ongoing teacher feedback.

The division of texts into clauses and then Theme and Rheme was a procedure transferable from the text analyses of the pilot and initial studies to the classroom in the main study. With appropriate scaffolding, students can construct their own texts (Er, 2001), exploring Thematic progression by incorporating New Information from the Rheme in one clause into the Theme of the following clause, for example. Eggins (2004:321) discusses the effect of scrambling Thematic structure, illustrating how a simple text can be rendered inaccessible by manipulating the order of the constituents, and the classroom materials encourage students to apply this idea to their own writing. The following activity was designed to illustrate to students how their own texts achieve cohesion and coherence:

Look back at lesson 4, to revise the way a sentence can be divided into Themes and Rhemes.

a) In pairs, look at the essay you wrote at the beginning of the course, and try to identify some of the Themes you have used. Do these Themes signpost the reader effectively? Do they reach a logical conclusion in the final paragraph?

Lesson 6 (p.19)

Issues discussed here were generated by and fed back into the design of the classroom materials, incorporating insights from data emerging from the initial study. The design of Lesson 7 (*Thematic Progression*) for example, entailed checking criteria for setting Theme boundaries against those established in the literature (cf Bloor and Bloor, 2004) and in the initial study, to maintain consistency and reliability. A principal concern (discussed in researcher-teacher meetings) was the appropriate choice of language features and level of detail, given the research framework. The teacher's main preoccupation was the metalanguage, which he found too detailed and difficult for the students ('native undergraduates from varieties of disciplines can't cope with so much metalanguage'), necessitating teacher input to clarify the explanations in each lesson. These concerns are explored in detail in sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 below.

The course material reflects therefore specific areas of language use discussed in the literature by authors working within an SFL framework, from the more theoretical sources such as Bloor and Bloor (2004), Eggins (2004), Halliday (1985), and Thompson (2004) and those whose focus is primarily pedagogical, such as Paltridge (2004), Butt et al. (2001), Er (2001), Martin (2001) and Hyland (2002). Although SFL has been applied to teaching programmes in many cases extensively and exclusively as, for example, in the LERN project described in section 2.2, above, SFL concepts also function in combination with more familiar approaches. Butt et al. (2001) assert that:

all functional approaches to grammar description and grammar teaching  
are firmly steeped in earlier traditions, building on the past not rejecting  
it.

(Butt et al. 2001:25)



The experimental phase materials here were integrated into an existing course, rather than followed as an independent scheme of work, the aim being an assessment of effectiveness within the framework of a more traditional methodology, not an evaluation of the materials in isolation.

One of the initial difficulties of the materials development process was the uncertainty regarding course books for the groups, making it impossible to choose a topic guaranteed to coincide with course book units. It was necessary, though, to find a subject which would potentially maintain interest over an extended period, with texts providing clear and comprehensible models for student writing. Many texts considered at the beginning were very culturally-biased and overly long, given the time limitations of the research. The search for discussion texts proved unfruitful, and finally an approach outlined by Knapp and Watkins (2005) was adopted; this recommends accessing content through describing and explaining, and then moving on to the genre of arguing once students have a good knowledge of the topic. The texts used within the course materials therefore reflect genre-types other than discursives, although the post- and pre-test compositions written by the students were discussion texts.

Texts taken from a British Council (2008) *Darwin Now* exhibition formed the basis of the materials. Darwin was chosen as a topic because it seemed less dependent on a familiarity with quite specific cultural experiences and expectations when compared with the topics of other texts from newspapers and magazines which perhaps fitted more easily into the discursive framework. Additional texts represented a range of sources, some written for children or young people, and selected for accessibility of topic and for coherence. Weaving together distinct themes across the lessons was an option, but given the time between classes it was felt that the existence of an increasingly familiar thread

binding the lessons would facilitate comprehension and a sense of logical progression. There was, concomitantly, a danger of repetition, and this was taken up by the teacher in feedback explored below, in section 5.2.2. Drawings aimed to support this continuity and to present the topic in as reassuring and enjoyable a way as possible, thereby motivating teacher and students to engage with the materials. The students' own writing, which itself constitutes the post and pre-test stages of the research, was woven into the lessons. The aim was to increase the relevance of the exercises and activities, and to illustrate the generalisability and applicability of the ideas.

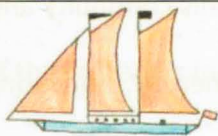
'The expression of the semantic unity of the text lies in the cohesion among the sentences of which it is composed' (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:293). Cohesion, as the central concern of the materials, was made explicit and comprehensible from the outset (Appendix 7). Initial study data highlighted features connected specifically to Theme and Rheme, but others relating more generally to textual organization and cohesion were included in the classroom materials. The following extract is from the end of lesson 2, looking at referents:

**To think about**

***Reference refers to the way in which established information is introduced and expanded upon in a text, and control of reference is important for maintaining information flow. Pronominal reference, which is the use of pronouns to avoid repeating nouns, is one way of achieving cohesion. Pronouns can be personal (*it, she, them they, etc*) or demonstrative (*this, these, etc*). Reference can also be used to express solidarity with the reader (*we*) and to refer outside the text to people in general (*you*). (p.6)***

Moving away from an original focus on two texts, the content incorporates a wider range of writing types and more accompanying practice with Theme and Rheme. The notion that a range of devices combine to establish textual cohesion and coherence is

introduced in the first two lessons, leading up to a presentation of the concepts of Theme and Rheme in lesson 4 (p.13):



Part 1

You will be given a copy of a text entitled *The Galapagos finches* (from the same exhibition as the *Evidence for Evolution* text), with some of the **Themes** taken out. The 'Theme' is located within the first part of the clause, and is explained in more detail below. In the less complex examples it normally goes up to (but does not include) the verb. The 'Rheme' is the remaining part of the clause. For this activity you should decide what the missing language might be. Your teacher will then give you the missing Themes and you should decide where to put them in the text.

Part 2

The following sentences have been divided into Themes and Rhemes:

Darwin	sailed around the world in the Beagle.
Science and religion	offer different ideas about the world.
Some Victorians* who read Darwin's ideas	were offended.
Darwin's loyal supporter, the scientist Thomas Huxley	coined the word 'agnostic'.
THEME	RHEME

\* people who lived in Britain during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901)

Here, the entire nominal (noun) group is included in the Theme. This is where the clause begins, and it is called the **TOPICAL THEME**. All clauses must have one Topical **Theme**.

Task 1

Your teacher will give you a card with a Theme or Rheme on it: you should try to find the student who has the matching part of your sentence (i.e. if you have a Theme, you are looking for a student with the corresponding Rheme, and vice-versa)

Task 2

Your teacher will give you a complete set of cards and instructions for a matching activity.

*In which part of the clause is new information usually presented?*

Lessons 5 and 6 discuss language features and patterns typically associated with each genre type, and the role of Theme in more detail. Once these ideas have been established and explored, lesson 7 (*Thematic Progression*) focuses on these Themes in combination, as cohesive devices, and lessons 8 and 9 introduce the other Theme types from the text analyses (Textual, Interpersonal and Marked).

The overall design thus reflects a gradual focusing in on specific features, from a more generalized introduction to the idea of textual organization, through an exploration of language areas and features involved in establishing cohesion. Different text types illustrate how grammatical principles operate to create distinct meanings and to determine reader response:

the analysis of cohesion will not tell you that this or that is a good text or a bad text or an effective or ineffective one in the context. But it will tell you something of WHY YOU THINK it is a good text or a bad text, or whatever you do think about it.

(Halliday and Hasan, 1976:328)

The attention narrows in the final lessons, to focus on Theme types and finally nominalisation, in lesson 10. This last is considered an area more easily understood when the different textual resources used to construct meaning have been explored.

Activity types allow for all stages of the teaching-learning cycle, with more controlled activities at the beginning moving toward those demanding greater learner autonomy (cf Hyland, 2007). Students are encouraged to make systematic reference to their initial compositions, focusing explicitly on the relationship between form and function, and to

produce increasingly complex texts at home. Opportunities for revision and consolidation are built into the activities and into the '*to think about*' sections at the end of the lessons.

Finally, one of the main differences between traditional materials and those developed within an SFL framework is an emphasis on the idea that the creator of a text exercises choice. These choices permeate all areas of language: they underlie and reinforce the relationship between language and context, and ultimately determine the success or otherwise of a text. The wrong choices can generate misunderstanding, offence, rejection and even hostility, so 'there is a powerful pragmatic reason for knowing as much as we can about how our language operates' (Butt et al. 2001:275). The research aimed to enable teachers and students to engage with texts more easily and knowledgeably, and to gain confidence in both text production and comprehension.

### ***3.4.2 Choice of language features***

In order to apply (mainly) new theoretical ideas to classroom practice within the time constraints (10 hours of classroom time plus homework activities), concepts needed to be simplified and organized within an understandable sequence. The following discussion describes the resulting process of selection and de-selection, illustrating some of the decisions and modifications made to the materials as the teaching progressed. A consideration of the impact of these ongoing decisions on the outcome forms part of the interpretation of results.

A principal design concern was the choice of textual features which might most interest and benefit students in their own writing (in line with initial study results), and the identification and management of an appropriate level of detail, within the research



framework. The aim was to isolate and then work with language areas constituting Vygotsky's ZPD: these were developed within a teaching-learning cycle allowing the requisite space for practice, extension and revision within a fairly limited time period. The notions of ZPD and scaffolding are strongly linked to the methodology activated within the materials, and determine also the teacher role, discussed in section 3.3.3, above. Nonetheless, integrating these theoretical constructs logically and comprehensively into practical classroom material proved complex, in part because neither researcher nor teacher knew the students when the materials were developed. Nominalisation was finally included, for reasons outlined below, but other language areas, such as a wider focus on modality, were ultimately excluded.

Marked Themes were included (in lesson 9), as certain text-types, such as instructions, legal arguments and scientific explanations, depend on these to achieve their purpose (Butt et al., 2001). The contribution of Marked Themes to overall structure and meaning is difficult to understand if they are not an element, or at least a consideration of, the students' own writing. As a resource for highlighting 'manner, condition or cause' (ibid.:153), no Marked Theme choice is accidental: 'when we find marked Themes we look for the purpose behind the speaker's patterning' (ibid.:139). Butt et al. also address the developmental aspect of Thematic control, asserting that students reach a point in their language development where they need to understand how to foreground clause elements or depart from the unmarked pattern when necessary. The research assumed student participants to be at this stage.

This study looks especially, although not exclusively, at discursive texts; other genres representing required exam types (such as information reports and recounts) were also included in the materials. This permitted the comparison of genre types, through a focus

on new concepts such as Theme and Rheme together with features such as linkers, interpersonal meanings and reference chains, which traditional course books might relate specifically to one text type, but which in reality extend across genres. The balance of the familiar with the unfamiliar was an important consideration. To understand new ideas, connections need to be established with existing knowledge, and opportunities provided to build on this; in some instances activities and explanations were judged too complex and/or lengthy for the class time available. The teaching input for Thematic progression, for example, was originally designed to include diagrams (cf Bloor and Bloor, 2004). Ultimately, however, more traditional and familiar EFL exercises such as highlighting progressions in colour, and cloze and jigsaw activities (cf Butt et al., 2001) were substituted, for greater accessibility.

#### Task 1

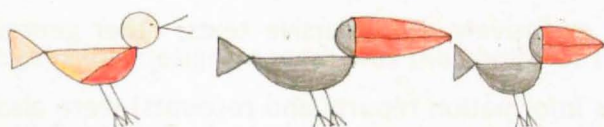
Your teacher will give you a card with a Theme or Rheme on it: you should try to find the student who has the matching part of your sentence (i.e. if you have a Theme, you are looking for a student with the corresponding Rheme, and vice-versa)

Lesson 4 (p.13)

b) Can you complete the following text with the Topical Themes below?

he, this, their heads – and especially their beaks, all, Darwin, they, Darwin

..... counted 13 different types of finch living on the Galapagos. .... were found only on the islands, and nowhere else in the world. .... were all closely related, but ..... were not all the same. .... concluded that finches on each island had adapted (changed) their beaks to eat the different food-plants growing in each habitat. But, as yet, ..... could not work out precisely how ..... had happened.



Lesson 4 (p.15)

These methodological decisions determine in some cases the metalanguage. The term 'linear theme pattern' for example, replaced 'cross-referential', because in the absence of diagrams something 'linear' is possibly easier to envisage:

**2. The linear Theme pattern** (incorporating the Rheme from one clause into the Theme of the next)

HMS *Beagle* was one of six new ships built for the British Navy between 1817 and 1820. All were designed to carry Navy surveyors, who made surveys of seas and coast-lines.

Darwin collected nine species of snake and 80 different types of birds. Hummingbirds fluttered so quickly that Darwin said they looked like moths.

Lesson 7 (p.27)

Nominalisation (Halliday's 'grammatical metaphor', 1985:321) was chosen as the focus for the last lesson, as a feature specific and fundamental to discursive writing: 'In many professional registers, above all in written genres, the use of nominalization has become extremely common' (Downing and Locke, 2002:461). Along with authors such as Eggins (2004), Bloor and Bloor (2004), Butt *et al.* (2001) and Knapp and Watkins (2005), Downing and Locke highlight nominalisation as a complex area, meriting in-depth discussion within a functional approach. A characteristic feature of academic texts, it frequently marks the differences between written and spoken English. It is also relevant across disciplines, and so worthy of inclusion here, where participants represent different university faculties. Martin (2001:220) asserts that

abstraction in the humanities can be very challenging. Literary criticism and historical interpretation may in fact be much more heavily



nominalized than scientific writing, and so no less of a problem for students to learn to read and write.

(Martin, 2001:220)

Because of this, and because of a lack of explicit focus on nominalization, 'many students continue to write as they talk' (ibid.). Neither is this problem confined to L2 students, and the materials might in future be adapted for use within L1 contexts. Montañó Harmon, discussing the discourse features of North American Chicano students 'with a limited level of literacy' notes that

the most salient characteristic of their compositions was the informal, conversational, oral tone used for communicating for social purposes with their peers. This, more than any other feature, marks their compositions as unacceptable in an academic setting, for the texts do not follow the conventions required for expository compositions for academic purposes.

(Montañó Harmon, 1991:419)

*present geographical distribution cannot be accounted for by differences in physical conditions*

This sentence (from *The Origin of Species*) would be expressed differently in spoken English (unless the speaker were reading from a text, in a university lecture, for example). We might say:

*we can't say that things are distributed geographically, just because they are different physically*

Lesson 10 (p.38)

EFL course books, though, sometimes ignore nominalisation or focus on decontextualised items, effectively obscuring the relationship between use and meaning. Inside Out

Intermediate (Kay et al., 2000:102) confines nominalisation (although it is never referred to as a specific phenomenon) to a section on 'uncountable nouns', without suggesting that these nouns might signal different levels of formality. The discussion concerns form rather than meaning: 'You cannot use uncountable nouns with numbers and you can rarely use them with the indefinite article', and the examples ('Knowledge is power' 'Beauty is Truth') are unlikely to generate understanding of use. For Paltridge (2004:41), 'the starting point of the (genre-based) syllabus ... will be the genre, or whole text', and the research materials attempt to avoid the presentation of language within isolated sentences.

The above decisions impacted directly upon other content; because of restricted space, Interpersonal and Textual Themes were combined into one lesson (8) and modality, originally considered as a separate topic, was excluded. The basis for this decision was that modality relates less specifically to discursive writing, but rather is embedded within all areas of language. Nonetheless, because of its centrality in English, it is difficult to discount modality within a writing course, and lessons 2, 3 and 8, for example, attempt to raise at least an initial awareness of its role in the writing process.

#### *b) Interpersonal grammatical metaphor and Mood Adjuncts*

The following are examples of *Interpersonal grammatical metaphor* (*I think, I believe*) and *Mood Adjuncts*: they can express opinion or recommendation, and are another type of Interpersonal Theme.

**I think, I believe, no doubt, maybe, certainly**

**I think** indicates the personal voice of the writer, and it can be an effective way of expressing an opinion without sounding too forceful. It does not usually indicate uncertainty (it often has the meaning of 'probably'), and it can make an argument sound more acceptable.

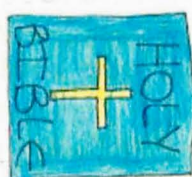
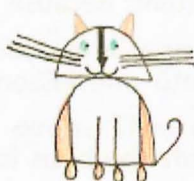
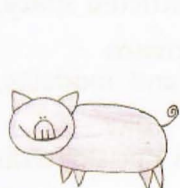
In the following extracts from *The Origin of Species*, Darwin uses this type of Interpersonal Theme to make his arguments sound less dogmatic.

Lesson 8 (p.31)



Reference chains, not isolated in the initial study, were included because cohesion is difficult to understand without some degree of familiarity with this feature; these chains are also readily identifiable in short texts, and students can map them easily in their own writing. Although recognizable to students, course books tend not to highlight them and they are often decontextualised.

In the following text, some words have been underlined, some are in **bold**, and some are in red. What is the connection between the words and phrases in each group?



Before Darwin, the vast majority of people in the world never gave a thought to the origin of animal species. **They** assumed that animals had looked and acted the same way forever. **A cat** was a cat, a pig was a pig. **It** was common sense. **After all**, **no one** had ever *seen* one kind of animal changing into another. **Besides**, **the Bible** says that God created all the animals long ago, **and most people** believed the Bible is always right. **But** as far back as ancient Greece, deep-thinking philosophers had speculated that evolution – or the changing of one species into another – *must* occur. **What no one before Darwin had ever figured out** was *how* it occurred.

Lesson 1 (p.2)

The original decision to exclude Interpersonal Themes, because of their inherent complexity and the limited time frame, was revisited. Although not explored in depth originally, this category seemed an important part of the understanding of Thematic options. In addition, initial study results showed high incidences of use for both native and non-native, and often *inappropriate* use in student writing. Lock (1996:230) equates an understanding of Interpersonal Themes with the facility to express viewpoint, but

recognises the complexity for students due to 'the often quite subtle nuances of attitude that can be conveyed by Modal Adjuncts'. The pre-test composition analysis confirmed these ideas:

**Maybe**, I prefer doing assessment with an only final exam (level 3 experimental)

**Probably as you would know**, **internet** have lots of advantatges (level 3 control)

it's **probably** that it will be a big problem (level 3 experimental)

And errors here should not be underestimated: Butt et al. suggest that

people outside the classroom are likely to be much more aware and understanding of the errors learners make with experiential meaning than they are of the errors learners make as they adjust that meaning interpersonally.

(Butt et al., 2001:129)

*As readers, we need to be able to assess the accuracy of the evidence offered by a text, and as writers we need to be able to present this evidence in ways which make both the ideas and our position clear to the reader. We might want to include different perspectives or to position ourselves somewhere between a definite yes or no; there are various resources available for doing this, one of which is **Interpersonal Themes**. It is important for students to understand at least some of what is a very complex area of grammar, because people outside the classroom are likely to be less tolerant of errors with this type of (interpersonal) meaning than they would be with other areas of the language.*

Teacher materials, lesson 8 (p.24)

Finally, another language area omitted was the movement from personal to impersonal voice, due to the difficulty of exploring this extensive topic in one lesson. It is discussed briefly in lesson 6, within the context of how a writer might express opinion: 'When I give

my opinion, I create a more impartial, polite tone by using 'impersonal' Themes such as 'it is perfectly plausible', '**anyone** who contemplates' rather than '**you**' or '**I**'. Nonetheless, despite the brevity of exploration in the materials, this was an area which seemed to develop and is returned to in later chapters.

Assessing the appropriate type and level of detail of instruction necessary for the teacher materials was not always straightforward: the aim was to avoid condescension but to ensure clarity and comprehensibility. It is also possible (and indeed, one of the desired outcomes of the research) that in the future the materials will be used by other teachers, many of whom might be less experienced and/or less comfortable with managing unfamiliar material in class, and this was a consideration.

### ***3.4.3 Metalanguage***

From the early stages of the research it was recognized that using SFL within the classroom would imply a certain amount of new terminology for learners and teachers. Because languages at secondary level in Spain are taught very traditionally, it was felt that student participants would be mainly comfortable with labels such as adjectives and adverbs, and would have at least an elementary understanding of their function within a clause. The teacher's feedback supported this assertion, although he also indicated that both SFL and traditional terminology can constitute barriers to explanation. Referring to a discussion activity in lesson 2 (Appendix 8) he suggested that the language needed to be more comprehensible, that 'clause' and 'referent' were unfamiliar terms for students, and that a glossary might be appropriate. Where the metalanguage was identified immediately as having been problematic with one group, additional exercises were drawn

up to make the lesson more accessible to the other group. The exercises (reproduced in Appendix 9), were designed to provide extra help with understanding the texts, so that the metalanguage might then be managed from a more confident position.

The complexity of the ideas and a potentially unfamiliar subject matter were therefore concerns; the metalanguage characterising SFL was kept to a minimum, to preclude unease or misunderstanding, although the teacher did not always judge that this had been achieved, as indicated above. The literature, though, accommodates differing opinions regarding metalanguage; Butt et al. (2001) argue that the ability to manage the specific SFL terminology is a valuable classroom tool, and Martin (2001) suggests that explicit teaching of information structure and the role of Theme in organising ideas and arguments might enable students to produce more effective texts. Materials can incorporate both traditional and functional grammatical terms, as, for example, in the Open University's 'Professional Communication for Business Studies' course (Donohue et al., 2008), where *subject*, *verb* and *noun* are used together with *Actor*, Halliday's term for the 'doer' of an action (Halliday, 1985:31, Eggins, 2004:136) and *process*. The concept of nominalisation, identified as a type of 'grammatical metaphor' in SFL (Eggins, 2004:94, Bloor and Bloor, 2004:126) is presented in easily comprehensible terms as 'how actions are turned into things' (2008:56). Again, metalanguage is a research feature discussed in detail within the context of the final results and conclusions.

#### **3.4.4 Activity-type**

The open-ended and interpretative nature of some activities, such as the Discussion section mentioned above, presented some difficulties. Students are asked to consider

interpersonal meanings connected to the grammar of interaction and tenor, including writer viewpoint, preconceptions, modality, and positioning; these are concepts pivotal to an SFL view of language, but often not given prominence in general course books. Students are also required to accept more uncertainty and less prescriptivism than they might normally do, and there is no message either stated or implied within the materials that a language area has now been 'learnt'. Rather, the methodological approach is that students gradually build an understanding of how meaning is created, through a 'construction of knowledge' (Mercer, 2004). The activities attempt to pass responsibility and control to the student while maintaining an appropriate level of teacher support through scaffolding, in line with Vygotsky's concepts of the ZPD and reconstruction. The role of the teacher, as discussed above, is central and active throughout (cf Christie, 1999, Hyon, 1996).

### ***3.4.5 Development process***

The materials provide content for ten 1-hour lessons and accompanying homework. They were designed as the main writing input for the experimental groups, replacing course book content, although it was left to the teacher to decide whether or not they were used exclusively. The emphasis is primarily on writing and reading, but some activities focus on oral (and, in some cases, listening) skills, areas developed concurrently through the appropriate course book units.

The first 5 lessons were forwarded to the teacher during the summer before the autumn term, to clarify at least the first term's input. Some fairly extensive revisions resulted in significant changes to these first lessons and to the plans for the remaining ones; material

was removed where a lesson or series of activities was considered too dense, with either an unfeasible amount of material to be covered in the allotted time, or an inappropriate level of complexity. At the teacher's request, extra activities were provided for lessons 3 and 4, to help the students find a way into the texts (see Appendix 9). These were the biggest changes: others were smaller, consisting of the addition of extra information or the substitution of one word for another, for example. More homework activities were incorporated, to compensate for potentially longer periods between lessons. Some areas were also evaluated as problematic during the pilot stage.

At the end of August 2009, the materials were piloted, in order to detect any immediate problems or questions with activities or instructions. This took place with an adult L1 Spanish speaker not involved in the main research, who had studied up to FCE level. The process resulted mainly in small changes in instructions and formatting. Although it was not possible to pilot group work activities, the accessibility of exercises and texts was partly assessed. Where instructions needed to be amended or changed in any way, these were sent to the teacher in a separate document. Sometimes the instructions for an activity were not changed, but the teacher was advised where there might be a need for expansion or further examples.

### ***3.5 Part 5: Sampling and data collection***

Data collection took place at the beginning of the autumn term, for the pre-test compositions, and at the end of the Easter term for the post-test compositions and qualitative student feedback from questionnaires. Texts were gathered from two level 3 (intermediate) and 2 CAE (Cambridge Advanced Exam) groups, and from one level 4



(upper intermediate). In the absence of a control group, the level 4 compositions were excluded: two control and two experimental groups were judged sufficient to explore the main research questions. Although the level 4 texts were not used in the quantitative analysis, qualitative feedback from the level 4 questionnaires is included in the discussion chapter.

**Table 3.2** Total numbers of scripts and questionnaires

<i>group</i>	<i>pre-test compositions</i>	<i>post-test compositions</i>	<i>questionnaires</i>
CAE	<b>13</b> experimental <b>12</b> control	<b>3</b> experimental <b>7</b> control	<b>1*</b>
Level 3	<b>19</b> experimental <b>13</b> control	<b>11</b> experimental <b>10</b> control	<b>12</b>
Level 4			<b>13</b>

\*(Many CAE students were absent when the questionnaire was administered. Subsequent efforts to collect the feedback were unsuccessful).

This represents an unanticipated change from the original design, with one lower level (3) and one higher (CAE) than the predicted level 4. While attempts were made to match the groups fairly (cf Cohen et al., 2006), the experimental and control groups differed slightly, at least in terms of timetable for CAE and size for level 3.

### **3.5.1 Questionnaires**

#### **3.5.1.1 Design**

The questionnaire comprised 5 open-ended questions and space for additional comments. It was designed to fit on one side of the paper, to encourage participation and because it was recognised that the qualitative data were important but needed to be kept to a manageable level, bearing in mind the time needed for the text analyses. The aim was to generate data which would focus on and illuminate aspects of the course related to the main research questions. It was hoped that the information collected would reflect student perceptions as accurately and reliably as possible, without the use of leading questions to either trigger or discourage particular responses; no reference was made to any specific language area or organisational feature in the questions. The students were asked to consider the classroom input from the perspective of their own feelings about writing, and to identify where they felt they had progressed, so that the researcher might gauge where the materials had proved most and least successful. The teacher requested that the questionnaire be written in English, rather than Spanish.

#### **3.5.1.2 Administration and data collection**

The questionnaire was administered *in situ* by the teacher, in the final lesson. Anonymity was preserved throughout, with each questionnaire identifiable by group number only. The response rate was lower than anticipated, due to contextual factors (discussed in chapter 5) rather than the questionnaire design itself.

### **3.5.2 Teacher feedback**

Oral and written feedback from the teacher was gathered systematically into a research diary. The diary was organised in two parts: the research leading up to the teaching phase, and the teaching phase itself. This second section contained brief summaries of phone-calls and discussions with the teacher and also some written feedback.

Researcher-teacher contact was regular (at least once a month) during the teaching phase, and points discussed were mainly procedural, although the methodology and theoretical concepts were also considered. The teacher's expectations did not always coincide with the researcher's own, and this was evident in some of the feedback. A final feedback session was held toward the end of the research, almost a year after the completion of the teaching phase, the timetabling deliberately planned to create space following the classroom input and allow time for reflection. This meeting, in the form of a semi-structured interview, generated extensive feedback on the teaching-phase as a whole.

The interview was structured around open-ended questions followed by prompts (The Open University, 2003b), following topics based on the student questionnaire and the teaching materials. There was flexibility, however, for the teacher to expand more fully on areas of particular interest and for the researcher to probe or re-direct the conversation if necessary.

Cohen et al. (2006:271) describe this interview format as the 'interview guide approach': Kvale (in Cohen et al., *ibid.*:272) suggests that one of the key characteristics of qualitative research interviews is that 'the interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standardized questions, nor entirely 'non-directive'. This 'focused'

interview is one of four types discussed by Cohen et al. (ibid.:290), who highlight as one of its distinctive features the prior knowledge and analysis on the part of the researcher of the situation under discussion. The interview process here did enable the researcher to check the validity and accuracy of ideas and conclusions reached during the teaching phase and to explore in greater depth the teacher's professional and affective reactions. Notes taken verbatim during this interview were then written up and added to the qualitative data.

Although feedback from the first term suggested that attendance at that stage was good, it was impossible to predict exact numbers for the post-test compositions. 'Experimental mortality' (Cohen et al., 2006:127), meaning imbalances between numbers of pre- and post-test compositions, was always a possibility, and did, in the end, occur. Nonetheless, because EIM studies represent credits within the university system, a high percentage of those students enrolled generally complete the courses. Level 4 (Upper Intermediate) equates to a B2.1 in the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, and for all students level B2 might be a future requisite for graduation.

The pre- and post-test composition titles were chosen by the teacher from a list compiled by the researcher around topics from course books and questions from past Cambridge and EIM internal exams.

**pre-test:** *What is the best method of assessment for students: a final exam, a coursework assessment or a mixture of both?*

**post-test:** *What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet for your university studies?*

In most cases, the compositions were written in class, although the CAE control group pre-test writing was done at home, a variable taken into consideration, but not resulting

in discernable differences. The pre-test compositions were then marked by the researcher; this process, intended primarily as motivational for the students, provided a first opportunity for detailed reading and assessment of the general level and method of organization. The teacher and researcher agreed that the correction should focus mostly on features connected with coherence, to establish a context and provide clear links with the material which the experimental groups would be using. The researcher felt that this emphasis might help students relate their own writing more easily to the course over the following weeks. After marking, the essays were returned to the students and copies retained, with student and teacher permission, for analysis.

The level 3 and CAE texts, which were mostly handwritten, were typed up and numbered in preparation for the analysis. This was done for ease of access and cross-checking. Every effort was made to retain the content and meaning of the original scripts: layout features such as paragraphing or underlining were maintained, and where the text was illegible, this was marked. Student errors were left uncorrected, in order to preserve sentence structure and overall organization, and also to avoid the imposition of unintended meaning; this policy is maintained wherever extracts from student texts and feedback are presented throughout this thesis. Although time-consuming, this process provided an opportunity to construct an initial idea of the main tendencies in areas such as text structure and Theme choice, and some analysis was begun concurrently with this stage. The decision was taken to analyse all the texts (rather than a sample) at clause level, and to include all clauses, after Halliday (1985) and Eggins (2004).

### 3.6 Part 6: Clause Analysis

This section describes the main clause types analysed for Theme.

#### 3.6.1. Thematised Comment, Interpersonal Theme and Marked Theme

The relationship between Thematised Comment, Interpersonal Theme and Marked Theme is complex, and the lines are drawn distinctly by different authors. This section outlines the development of understanding of this relationship within this study, and the way in which this approach both reflects and in part diverges from the interpretations of other authors.

Although Thematised Comments are categorized in the present study as Marked Theme, this is contentious, and some authors class them as Interpersonal Themes (cf Thompson and Thompson, 2009). In the initial study, Thematic Comment was analysed following Halliday (1985) (e.g. *it* in *it is clear* without the comment as Theme) but Thompson's argument is convincing. He describes it as a 'special thematic structure, which in some ways resembles predicated Theme' (2004:152), enabling the writer to highlight interpersonal meaning at the beginning of the message. Analysing *it* only as Theme loses this aspect of meaning. Thematised Comment, therefore, was initially included within Interpersonal Themes, for the pilot study and initial study, but finally analysed separately, as Marked Theme, in the main study.

Examples from the student texts include:

**It is clear that** on many occasions they held in other partners working in group or chatting their assignments **(CEA cont pre)**

*For this reason, it is important* to point out the weakness of each one *in order to show* which better **(CAE cont pre)**

**I think it's very difficult** to choose one method of assessment for students **(L3 cont pre)**

Within the initial study, Theme-type results suggested that native and non-native texts managed the interpersonal area of meaning differently, an idea which was later to be developed in the main study. Theme Predication, for example ('it' clauses), although not dealt with specifically in the initial study, formed part of the continuing analyses and was closely related to the Thematised Comments of the main study. There are differences, though, and this divergence drew attention to the potential importance and complexity of this area of the analysis.

Predicated Theme (a term used by Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:95) is traditionally known as a cleft sentence, and allows the writer or speaker to emphasise the constituent in Thematic position. Examples offered by Thompson (2004:151, Fig 6.14) include

It's not the technology	which is wrong.
It is we	who have not learnt how to use it.
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Rheme</b>

Thematised Comment also allows this foregrounding of Thematic choice, but incorporates additional characteristics. Firstly, it allows the speaker or writer to comment on the truthfulness or validity of what they are saying (Thompson, *ibid.*:152), through the use of

comments such as 'it is true that', 'it is necessary', 'it is important'. The second difference, noted by Thompson, is a syntactic one:

With thematized comment, the comment in the 'it'-clause is not a meaning component of the second clause, and it is not possible to rewrite them in the form of a single clause as we were able to do with the examples of predicated Theme:

It's not the technology which is wrong. = The technology is not wrong.

It is true that it took five years to do so. = ?

(Thompson, 2004:152)

For these reasons, Predicated Theme and Thematized Comment were analysed here (in the main study) as separate Theme types, in line with Thompson (ibid.).

Along with the categories of Circumstance, and Dependent clause, Thematized Comment emerged from the data, rather than being a pre-determined category for analysis: the additional complexity and greater detail of the analytical process, together with the far larger amount of data resulting from the main study, highlighted more and more instances of this area of language use. It became increasingly clear that this was, if not a completely separate Theme-type, at least a very distinctive use of Theme and one that merited careful exploration. The analytical approach was reconsidered during the analysis of the CAE post-test scripts, when uncertainty and confusion arose, primarily because of the very close relationship between Thematized Comment and Interpersonal Themes. (The inclusion of Thematized Comment within Interpersonal Themes would have altered the results for the CAE experimental group, because this Theme type was still used post-



test, whereas Interpersonal Themes were not). With the exception of Thompson, these Themes are generally grouped together, and although Thematised Comments occupy the place of Theme, they often include a very strong interpersonal element; Thompson and Thompson, for example, discusses their role within a section on modality, the area of the clause where interpersonal meanings are located.

Most analysts who are working on Theme in text would accept that the use of such clauses in initial position is significant both in mapping the unfolding of texts and in characterising different registers in terms of thematic patterns.

(Thompson and Thompson, 2009:47)

In this same article, however (accessed after the analysis), Thompson and Thompson re-identify Thematised Comments as Interpersonal Themes. They assert that a literal and metaphorical interpretation of clauses such as *I think* and *it is probable* are both feasible: the former assigns both their own Theme-Rheme structure, while the latter analyses them as interpersonal elements forming part of a longer Theme, and 'neither reading is 'truer' than the other – the 'value added' of having double readings in co-existence is one of the communicative benefits of grammatical metaphor' (Thompson and Thompson, *ibid.*:47). Despite the complexity, however, the decision to analyse both Theme types separately was adhered to, for the reasons outlined here and also because Thematised Comments do seem to represent a distinct method of organising ideas within a text.

Nonetheless, the analysis was not always straightforward, and more problematic cases are described and discussed in 4.1.3. The relationship between Thematised Comment and Interpersonal Themes is suggested as a possible focus for future research in section 7.3.

### *3.6.2 Independent and dependent clauses*

The composition analysis in the main study was considered over the course of the first year of the research. The objective was the alignment of the main theoretical focus (Theme and Rheme contribution to textual organization), with the pedagogical implications of using a text-based approach to teaching writing. One of the central tasks of the research design was the establishment of an analytical procedure which would be appropriate and viable in terms of addressing the main research questions, given the number of texts (many more here than in the initial study). The Theme-Rheme division needed to generate data relevant to these questions, and so the main issues centred around which clauses to analyse. It was important to determine both the optimum level of detail of the analysis, and where the main focus should be; Thematic description of all clauses (dependent and main) is complex, and the pilot and initial studies raised questions concerning the level of complexity valid and valuable for this research.

The initial study had analysed texts at clause level, after Halliday (1985) and Eggins (2004). First decisions now involved whether this analytical method could be replicated or whether it should be adjusted, and, if so, to what end. Halliday states that

the choice of clause Themes plays a fundamental part in the way discourse is organized: it is this, in fact, which constitutes what is often known as the 'method of development' of the text. In this process, the main contribution comes from the Thematic structure of independent clauses. But other clauses also come into the picture, and need to be taken account of in Theme-Rheme analysis.

Halliday (1985:62)

Nonetheless, in a point of departure from the initial study approach, it was decided that the T-unit (an independent clause with its dependent clauses) would be a more appropriate method of analysis, at least for Thematic progression. It was thought that this approach would allow for a more efficient exploration of larger sections of text, while still potentially describing Thematic choices and textual progression.

It became clear during the first year of the research that, even within a shared grammatical approach, authors offer varying interpretations of text construction at the level of Theme and Rheme. It was therefore necessary to make decisions perhaps not previously contemplated in sufficient detail, concerning the application of the analytical systems from the literature to the analysis here. Across the literature, two main approaches are adopted: the analysis of all clauses for independent Themes, and the grouping together of each independent clause with its own dependent clauses, into 'T-units'. Although Thematically the development of a text can be carried through an analysis of all clauses, Thompson (2004) asserts this might not be necessary; Fries (in Thompson, 2004:156) suggests that with more than one dominant clause the most useful unit for analysing Theme is the T-unit, 'an independent clause together with all the clauses that are dependent on it' (cf Hyland, 2002, Jones, 2005). This procedure is favoured by other authors, especially where Thematic progression is concerned: McCabe (1999:73) provides a comprehensive overview of researcher stance, and concludes that 'the optimal unit of analysis for Thematic progression is the independent conjoinable clause complex' (i.e. the T-unit). Nonetheless, as the Thematic analysis progressed, it became increasingly apparent that discounting all dependent clause Themes was generating an over-simplified picture of Theme choice which would also impact on the descriptions of Thematic progression. The decision was reversed, and some types of dependent clauses were also analysed. The pre-test compositions include instances

where argument threads are opaque, not through inappropriate Theme choice at T-unit heads, but through an unsuccessful combination of independent and dependent clauses, which confuses rather than advances the argument. Textual organization is very fundamentally, but not exclusively, bound to The Thematic structure of independent clauses (Halliday, 1985), and ignoring the contribution of dependent clauses disregards many important writer decisions and strategies. Although the decision to analyse these dependent clauses probably mostly affected the Thematic progression analysis, it represents also a pivotal aspect of Theme choice.

Underlying this type of methodological decision is the notion of taxis, which describes the construction of paratactic and hypotactically related clauses within a text (Eggs, 2004). Paratactic clause complexes assign equal status to each independent clause (Halliday, 1985), and Thematic analysis is therefore applied individually in each case. Within this type of paratactic relationship, clauses are often joined with linking conjunctions such as *and* or *but*, and the analysis is generally straightforward (although sometimes the categorization of a textual conjunction as co-ordinator or subordinator is more complex, as illustrated in chapter 4, below). Clauses within a hypotactic relationship, however, consist of a dependent clause bound to a dominant clause, and it is the order of these clauses which is of special interest Thematically (cf Eggs, 2004, Halliday, 1985). The *unmarked* Thematic sequence is dominant > dependent, and where this is reversed, the marked option is created. This affects textual meaning, suggesting that the whole clause is functioning as Theme (Thompson, 2004), and this analytical approach is adopted here.

However, if a dependent clause in initial position is treated as Thematic in this way, Thompson (2004:156) argues that 'the corollary of this is that when the dominant clause comes first, the Theme of that clause functions as Theme for the whole clause complex,

including the dependent clause'. This strategy is not used here, for the reasons outlined above. It would mean assigning one governing Theme in the examples below, for instance, whereas it seems clear that the writers chose to highlight certain meanings: the *reason* for the statement in the first and second clauses of the first two examples, and the *additional information* about the assessment method in the third. Although in the first example, unlike the others, the two Themes do not share the same referent, the role in each case of establishing a 'semantic connection between clauses' (Thompson, 2004:204) was evaluated as an important contributory factor to textual organisation and cohesion.

**Personally, I think** *that* **it's** the best option *because* **students** are going to be experienced graduates in research **(CAE ex)**

**For people who are working and studying at the same time,** final exam is the best method *because* **they** won't go at all classes **(L3 ex)**

*On the other hand,* **there is** the opposite kind of assessment **where** the student is being evaluated during the whole course **(CAE cont)**

The following colour coding schemes were devised for the text analyses, and are maintained in the examples throughout this report:

**Bold:** Topical

*Italics:* Textual

**Red:** Interpersonal

**Green:** dependent clause Themes (subsequently included)

**Blue:** Thematic error or unclear meaning

**Mauve:** interrupting clauses

**Figure 3.4** Colour coding

Figure 3.5., below, sets out the abbreviations used in the extracts from the student texts.

**pre:** pre-test text

**post:** post-test text

**ex:** experimental

**cont:** control

**L3:** level 3

**Figure 3.5 Abbreviations**

Dependent clause Themes and interrupting clauses (Butt et al., *ibid.*) were later additions:

*But, on some subjects, especially (missing Theme) which are very theoretical, would probably need an obligated final exam (CAE cont pre)*

Within the dependent clause discussion, Halliday (1985) analyses finite dependent clauses for Theme, and the analyses above are consistent with his approach (he uses the term 'structural' rather than 'textual' Theme). Where a dependent clause begins with a WH-element, this constitutes the Topical Theme (Halliday, *ibid.*, Eggins, 2004). Although non-finite dependent clauses may contain a preposition as Textual Theme, followed by a Subject as Topical Theme (Halliday, *ibid.*), many non-finite clauses consist only of Rheme, representing exceptions to the Topical Theme rule described above. While not focusing explicitly on this problem, Butt et al. (2001:298) include within an example text several non-Thematic non-finite dependent clauses, and non-finite clauses with only a structural (Textual) Theme. Eggins (2004:357) however, assigns Topical Theme status to the non-finite verb forms in several analyses of her 'Crying Baby texts' although, again, the approach is not discussed: 'You could maybe tire him out by taking him for a walk'. (In Eggins' texts, Theme is underlined, Topical Theme is in **bold**, and Textual Theme is in *italics*). Bloor and Bloor (2004:182) identify similarities between these non-finite dependent clauses and Adjuncts and Circumstances, and label them as *expansion clauses*:



'the expansion function cuts across the paratactic/hypotactic dimension so that both hypotactic and paratactic clauses can realize that function.' The present study analyses these clauses for Textual Theme only, following Butt et al. (2001) and Halliday (1985) (who treats them as non-finite enhancing clauses).

*For this reason, I would like to analyse the different educational options in order to improve the current situation of our graduates (CAE ex)*

*Finally, I think it is very important to consider the kind of subject and the best way to learn it before discussing the method of assessment (CAE ex)*

Non-finites also occur in some cases of projection, which Bloor and Bloor (ibid.) identify as the 'counterpart' to expansion. Other clause types, such as hypotactic expansions, are analysed distinctly by different authors. Halliday treats these as dependent clauses, Fawcett (in Bloor and Bloor, ibid.) as embedded. Downing and Locke (2002) discuss both interpretations, but prefer the dependent clause option, which is adopted here.

### 3.6.3 Rankshift (embedded) clauses

More complicated (because more compact) are embedded clauses, or 'rankshift' clauses in systemic terminology. 'Dependent clauses are not embedded. Dependent clauses differ crucially from embedded (i.e. rankshifted) clauses because in a clause complex the clauses are not 'demoted' to function at some lower rank' (Bloor and Bloor, 2004:188). Rankshift clauses are described as having 'two depths' (ibid.:155), functioning both as a constituent of another (superordinate) clause, and with their own internal Thematic structure. Halliday (1985:63) suggests that although the Thematic structure of these clauses coincides with that of dependent clauses, their 'down-ranking' prevents them functioning as constituents of a sentence: 'their thematic contribution to the discourse is

minimal, and for practical purposes can be ignored'. This approach, supported by Butt et al. (2001), is used here, with dependent but *not* embedded (defining relative) clauses analysed for Theme.

**Unfortunately, there are** several families that cannot afford the education of their children **(CAE cont)**

Egins (2004:316) analyses defining relative clauses also for Theme, with relative pronouns (in defining and non-defining) such as WHO and WHICH 'as a conflation (fusing) of topical meaning ... and a structural element'. Defining relative clauses here, however, are treated as embedded clauses, and are not analysed Thematically:

**They** are people who have to pay their studies themselves **(CAE cont)**  
*Finally, I think it's important* that the theacher who assess (*sic*) the students thinks about the personels (*sic*) characteristics of the people who asses **(L3 cont)**

**3.6.4 Non-defining ('non-restrictive') relative clauses**

Non-defining relative clauses 'are less intimately bound up with the item they relate to and are analyzed not as embedded clauses, but as dependent clauses' (Bloor and Bloor, *ibid.*:182). Despite depending grammatically on the dominant clause, they are separate from it, providing additional information, and are not rankshifted. They are thus interpreted as hypotactic, rather than paratactic structures.

The identification of dependent clause type is sometimes complicated in student texts; in the first example below, the punctuation is problematic, but in the second, the error is unclear: is the intended meaning '*this kind of student, who*' or '*the kind of student who*'?



The context suggests the second option (i.e. an embedded clause), and is the interpretation here, but this is necessarily subjective.

*On the other hand, there is* the opposite kind of assessment *where* the student is being evaluated during the whole course **(CAE cont)**

**This method** is useful for this kind of students who get very nervous in the final exams and are not efficient at all **(CAE ex)**

### 3.6.5 Projection

This is an important category, because it links so strongly to the expression of interpersonal meaning, representing an overlap within the Theme analysis process with the interpersonal meaning carried by mental process projecting verbs such as *think* and *believe*. Where the projecting clause maps a clear opinion or viewpoint onto the text, the interpersonal Theme is identified, and then the Topical Theme in the projected clause:

*Finally, I think that the best method of assessment* is the coursework **(L3 cont)**

Halliday (1985:196) defines projection as a logico-semantic relation whereby 'the secondary clause is projected through the primary clause, which instates it as (a) a locution or (b) an idea'. Eggins (2004:232) asserts that as such, it is a way of binding clauses within a logical relationship and 'the 2 clauses which are in a projection relationship may be dependent upon each other or independent', so that both clauses need to be analysed for transitivity. If the projecting clause is reporting, rather than quoting, then it is a dependent clause, which is the type found in the student compositions. 'Projection cross-selects for taxis' (Eggins, *ibid*:272), so that the clause

relationship can be paratactic or hypotactic. Thompson (2004:162) shows the Theme for the projected (reporting) clause as separate from that of the projecting clause, because 'in many cases the Theme of the projected clause ... links in with the topic of the text, while the Theme of the projecting clause ... primarily 'frames' the information by identifying the source', and so the identification of both individually highlights their separate functions within the text. Although Thompson accepts that this is an 'unresolved issue' (cf Bloor and Bloor, 2004), the present study follows this approach, identifying a separate Theme within the projected clause.

As with other dependent clauses, projections may be finite or non-finite, and Eggins (2004:236) includes examples of non-finite projections within a text analysis as having no Theme. Clauses where verbs like *want* are followed by a to-infinitive presented difficulties here, because these 'are on the boundary between hypotactic clause complexes and verbal group complexes' (Bloor and Bloor, 2004:206). In line with Bloor and Bloor, they are analysed as hypotactic projections with 'that' clauses, while the combination with to-infinitive structures is interpreted as a single clause (containing a verbal group complex).

### **3.7 Part 7: Conclusion**

The practical implementation of the experimental methodology and the materials development described above generated the data for the analyses, findings and interpretations which comprise the following chapters. Chapter 4 describes the analytical procedure, the results of which are presented in chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses and interprets these results, within the context of the literature review of chapter 2 and with reference to the methodological decisions outlined in chapter 3. This discussion is

extended in chapter 7, which explores those areas of the research relating most closely to the original research questions, and looks at the implications of the results for future research and classroom practice.

## Chapter 4: data analysis

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The data gathering and analysis process centred on constructing a reliable and complete body of quantitative and qualitative information, and the main aim in this chapter is to illustrate the analytical procedure so that the results might be interpreted within a framework as open and transparent as possible. The quantitative data from the texts is related to ideas within the literature, through examples and descriptions of some of the decision processes. Qualitative data from student and teacher feedback is analysed primarily through the identification of patterns and relations among responses, using the questionnaire as a framework. 'Progressive focusing' (The Open University, 2003a:67) allowed emerging ideas from ongoing and accumulating teacher feedback to be incorporated into the preliminary stages of analysis, and to feed from there into the final interpretation of data.

The data set here did not lend itself to statistical analysis, due mainly to low numbers (especially in the case of post-test compositions) and the exploratory nature of the study. Statistical analysis was not ruled out at the beginning, when the possibility of using more groups was under consideration, but as the research progressed it was felt that the data collected did not justify this procedure, and might even generate results which were invalid, because of the sample size. (Morrison, cited in Cohen et al., (2006:129) suggests that 'an unrepresentative, skewed sample, one that is too small or too large, can easily distort the data, and indeed, in the case of very small samples, prohibit statistical analysis'). It became apparent that the data analysis procedure used for the student texts was resulting in findings which, although restricted in scope and very much bound to their

context, seemed appropriate and relevant to answering the main research questions, and it was not clear that statistical analysis would either further the argument (Burgess et al., 2007:87), or capture the 'complexity of issues' (Cohen et al., 2006:116). The qualitative information from the questionnaires established a context for the results from the texts: Burgess et al. comment that

contexts are a guide for those who read research outcomes so that they can understand where research questions are located and why the researcher has chosen this particular focus.

Burgess et al. (2007:59)

In a larger study, if the research questions were widened to focus on different groups and levels, yielding a greater amount of data, statistics might reveal patterns and tendencies otherwise unapparent, potentially providing a focus for future work. Nonetheless, in this type of small-scale study the aims are different, as noted by Schofield:

the goal is *not* to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issues would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation'.

(Schofield, 1993:93)

## 4.1 Quantitative data

### 4.1.1 Theme

The analysis began with the pre-test compositions. Following the identification of the Topical Theme, the Theme/Rheme boundary was established, and remaining clause constituents (after the boundary) assigned to the Rheme. Topical, Textual and Interpersonal Themes were identified, and separate files compiled, showing only the Themes for each text. Categories for quantitative data therefore included a division of Themes into those types established by Butt et al. (2001:153): *topical*, *textual*, *marked* and *interpersonal*.

Textual and Interpersonal Themes were counted, and the most common Themes identified. Marked Topical Themes were grouped following those categories used mainly in Butt et al. (2001) and Halliday (1985); this process was adopted in order to generate more detailed analyses, provide a clearer picture of the information selected for sentence initial position, and, ultimately, to facilitate an assessment of the contribution of the teaching materials to these choices. The *Circumstances* category was further divided, as a resource used consistently across the compositions, and seemingly worthy of investigation. Authors such as Butt et al. (ibid.), Halliday (ibid.) and Thompson (2004) offer extensive explorations of this type of Marked Theme. Heavy Theme denotes those instances where a large amount of information is included in the Theme (Thompson and Thompson, 2009), and is a quantitative rather than qualitative category definition.

**Table 4.1** Division of Marked Themes for CAE Control post

<b>CIRCUMSTANTIAL (C)</b>  Location (time) <b>6</b> location (place) <b>0</b> status, role <b>0</b> extent <b>0</b> manner (means) <b>2</b> contingency <b>1</b> cause <b>2</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>THEMATISED COMMENT (TC)</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC)</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses)</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF)</b>	<b>8</b>

Where the analysis raised doubts, the source of the analytical approach adopted was recorded with cross-references to those scripts containing the same or related language items. Considerations regarding the most appropriate classification were noted alongside references to the relevant literature:

<b>CAE ex pre TOPICAL Themes</b>  <b>Depending on the kind of studies (non-finite clause), circ contingency</b> (Butt et al.:65)* (analysed here as contingency)  *see reference in group 4, and Thompson (2004:111) ‘There are many cases where a cline can be drawn up with a message being expressed either as a separate independent clause, or as a dependent clause in a clause complex, or as a circumstance inside a clause’
---

Problematic cases were gathered into 6 groups (described in section 4.1.3, below) for subsequent, more detailed exploration. The relationship between items was often complex, dependent not only on syntax but on meaning across all three levels encoded in the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. In some cases, theoretical insights and/or examples from the authors referred to were noted, as above. This list of cases was extensive, but its compilation became progressively simpler, as Themes from

the first texts re-emerged in other texts. Similarly, this procedure for the post-test compositions proved more straightforward, as many Themes were familiar. Following the identification of Theme type, the analysis moved on to Thematic progression.

This initial process was lengthy, involving systematic and detailed comparisons of scripts to ensure consistency, together with thorough checking of the Thematic assignation processes in the literature. The authors mainly used are cited, together with examples, throughout this chapter. Scrolling from text to text, to isolate, describe, classify and group similar cases of language use generated a significant amount of preliminary information, which ultimately provided the basis for understanding both the function of Themes within the texts, and their contribution to Thematic progression. The post-test compositions were analysed following the same procedure, although the process was refined, with new categories (such as dependent clause Themes) included within Theme types and subsequently incorporated into the pre-test analyses.

It was difficult at the outset to predict the Thematic type which the scripts might primarily use, although the initial study had suggested that L2 texts use more Textual Themes than L1 texts, similar numbers of Interpersonal and Marked Themes, and fewer clauses as Themes. The categories of Circumstance, Thematised Comment and Dependent clause were not pre-determined, but rather emerged from the data, as the analysis proceeded; the interpretation of results is thus derivative, and grounded in the composition data (cf Cohen et al., 2006). Nonetheless, these categories coincide with Thompson's Marked and Enhanced (2004:164); merging these into one Marked Theme category (in line with Halliday, 1985) provided an appropriate level of detail for the present research.

Some Themes did not fit easily into any of the main types above, especially where the function was to summarise or refer back to longer stretches of text. These Themes were



not finally explored in detail as a separate category; many seemed to relate closely to Textual Themes, and were analysed as such.

For all these reasons, I think the best method is coursework assessment (CAE ex pre)  
All in all, a mixture of both assessments is the best option (CAE ex pre)

4.1.2 Thematic progression

The colour coding system for Theme type (Topical, Textual, Interpersonal, dependent clause) was extended to the Thematic progression analysis, with many language items assigned various colours to illustrate an overlap of functions. The following types of progression were identified: Constant (or Repeated), Cross-Referential (Zig-Zag) and Derived (Split).



Figure 4.1 Thematic Progression Key

\* Originally identified where the reference is used to refer back to a whole section of the text (cf Butt et al., 2001:242), this was initially considered as a possible separate category.

*For all these reasons, I think the best method* is coursework assessment (CAE ex pre)

In the end, however, there were very few examples, so these Themes were analysed as Textual, Topical or Marked, as discussed in section 4.1.3, below.

\*\* Where the meaning is unclear, ambiguous or misleading, through, for example, syntactic, semantic or orthographic error.

### Example scripts

(Complete example scripts are included in Appendix 10).

If we focus on the final exam method, we can see that it is a good way for people who are studying and working at the same time. They are people who have to pay their studies themselves and this method lets them freedom to organize their time (CAE ex pre)

Secondly we have the final exam that it is a UNSUCCESSFUL exam when the finish year. The problem with that method is that the students only have some opportunity. (L3 cont pre)

But there are also disadvantages. For instance, there is too much information, so much that sometimes you couldn't choose it. Also, this information could be false. Internet is a easy way to distract yourself, because there are lots of plays and funny websites that in a specific moment could interrupt your important obligations. (L3 cont post)

Totals were added after each script, as below:

**(L3 ex pre)**

Constant Theme pattern: 16 (5 short chains)

Linear (zig-zag) Theme pattern: 8 instances

Derived Theme: 1\*

\*these are discussed in section 4.1.2.3. Ultimately, this progression type was not analysed in detail, due to time constraints and the lack of successful instances of use in the texts.

Some Themes were marked as part of more than one chain, especially in the case of Derived (cf McCabe, 1999). Dubois (in McCabe, *ibid*:179), describes this as a 'multiple' type of complex development. Ellipsed (but not *missing*) Themes were included in the Theme count, following Bloor and Bloor (2004). Themes in paragraph headings or titles (present in very few scripts) were not analysed (cf McCabe, 1999). A section of one text was discounted because numerous errors prevented a reliable analysis.

The use of T-units for the analyses was an important methodological consideration; the identification of cross-referential Themes was initially limited exclusively to independent clauses in line with authors such as Thompson (2004) and Fries (in Thompson, 2004). This decision was then reversed partly for the sake of consistency with the Theme type analysis, but also because the exclusion of Thematic threads carried through dependent clauses seemed to discount conscious choices contributing systematically to textual organization. Non-defining clauses were ultimately included, but not defining, which are a type of embedded clause.

Central to the analysis was a consideration of the way the teaching materials approach this aspect of text structure: where possible, ideas and approaches from the literature

were incorporated into the initial design and ongoing development of these materials. Butt et al. (2001:145) include dependent clauses in their analyses, but Thematic progression, especially at this level of detail, is not dealt with extensively in the literature; Thompson and Thompson (2009) for example, look at 'threads' of Theme, without identifying specific progression types. Although examples of Thematic threads with dependent clauses can result in textual patterns which are complex for students, these links contribute fundamentally to textual cohesion, are evident in student writing, and merit exploration.

The following sub-sections outline some of the questions arising during the Thematic progression analysis.

#### ***4.1.2.1 Constant (Repeated) Themes***

Determining when repeated Themes constitute chains, for purposes of counting, was sometimes complex. Dubois (in McCabe, 1999:176) states that this type of Thematic progression can be 'contiguous or *gapped*', while McCabe, describing her own work, sees longer gaps (3 clauses) between referents as undesirable: 'Themes for which the reader has to go back more than 2 clauses to find a previous mention of a concept were not counted as part of a thematic progression chain'. The analysis here follows Butt et al. (2001:142), who are less prescriptive: they suggest that the Themes should be located within the same stretch of language and connect with clauses 'not too far before', although each case here was also judged on an individual basis (see below). It is difficult to describe quantitatively the number of clauses or maximum length of a section of text within which two or more clauses link successfully; the criterion here was a sense of



cohesion and logical uninterrupted progression in the mind of the reader. This type of analysis is necessarily subjective and 'almost inevitably interpretive' (Cohen et al., 2006:282): it involved re-reading the texts several times to ensure as consistent and reliable an analysis as possible.

Many texts have 2 constant Themes, which never really develop into a chain; for the purposes of this study, chains need to comprise a coherent link of two or more. The distance between the elements may be but is not *necessarily*, the deciding factor: **this assessment** (in the first example below) is identified as a chain, but **it's important** (in the second) isn't, because it seems to represent a new chain of thought, almost contradicting the previous idea:

I think that the best method is a mixture of both. The coursework assessment is a good method to evaluation the students because they do homework and study every day. Also they work in pairs or small groups to do exercises

But this assessment spend much time of the students (L3 ex pre)

In my opinion, it's very important do homework every week and do more exams for learn the concepts during the curs. This form you learn slowly and I think it's better

Also I think it's important do a final exam to remember all the concepts that you have learnt (L3 ex pre)

There are instances where, despite clauses in the middle, Themes form a comprehensive and clearly developed chain

If we focus on the final exam method, we can see that it is a good way for people who are studying and working at the same time. They are people who have to pay their studies themselves and this method lets them freedom to organize their time to study without going to class and then sit the exam. On the other hand, it is true that you can have a bad day the day of the exam and this method only give you one opportunity to succeed (CAE cont pre)

and others where Themes are further apart, but at significant points in the text, so that they clearly continue a chain. Below, the same Theme begins two consecutive paragraphs:

**The best method of assessment** is difficult to choose (L3 ex pre, paragraph 1)

**The best method of assessment** is a mixture of both (paragraph 2)

Thematic links of this type may jump across clauses and still be successful; the complex dependent clause separating **this** from **coursework assessment**, does not affect the meaning:

**the students that only has the responsibility of going to classes** usually prefer **coursework assessment** because **they** have more time to do homework and prepare the little exams during the course. Moreover, **this** is a good option ... (CAE cont pre)

Nonetheless, **you** below is not counted as a chain; the number of intervening clauses and the change in focus (from subject to object) of the second **you** impacts negatively on continuity:

but **in the middle of semester** you need to start studying and **you** can ask at **others class mates** because **they**\* help you with this subject that you can't understand. But a negative thing is let it all for **the last day**, so **in this moment** **UNSUCCESSFUL** (missing 'it') is impossible that **you** can do anything (L3 cont pre)

\* **they** (blue superimposed on green may be unclear on the hard copy of the report).

Sometimes the chains are very intertwined (original errors uncorrected)

**The coursework assessment** is the opposite of a final exam. **This method** helps the students to organize the work, and **they** can learn more slowly, and **it** is very good *because the students* insist more in all the things they have to learn. **The problem of this method** is the time, *because the students* need more time to do the exercises (L3 ex pre)

and sometimes they are difficult to identify. It is unclear, for example, where the referent is for **this method** below:

**The mixture of both**, I think is interesting *if the relative punctuation* is correct.\* *In this case, for me, is more important the coursework assessment* than the final exam, but **this method** is good if the students have time to do all (L3 ex pre)

\* *'if the relative punctuation* is correct' is taken to mean 'if the relative marks (for a final exam and coursework assessment) are fairly distributed'.

The link below was judged unsuccessful because at first reading it is misleading: *they* seems to refer to students *and* teachers:

*maybe because* is the most practical method for students and teachers *because they* (UNSUCCESSFUL) only have to correct one exam (L3 ex pre)

Other areas needing clarification included those cases where a repeated language item does not represent a repeated Theme (pronouns such as *it* often have diverse referents). Conversely, a repeated Theme may be identified through different language items, such as a noun and pronoun or nouns with shared intended meaning (*students* and *people*, for example). A Thematic chain can also be developed through topic or context:



**Nowadays**, the methods of assessment in the University are changing. **A few years ago**, the assessment method consisted in a final exam, **and today** in most of the cases you have to present some kind of written work (**CAE cont pre**).

**One of its advantages** is the facilities that internet have. *For example*, **it's** a good way to communicate the exams **and the teachers** can put the things that we do on class. *On the other hand*, **it** has a disadvantage like all things. **Students** may think *that it is easy* to study with the notes that are on the internet **and they** decide not to go to class. **That's** a mistake *because most of the teachers* doesn't put notes on the internet (**L3 ex post**)

#### 4.1.2.2 Cross-Referential (Zig-Zag or Linear) Themes

Instances of complete links were recorded, rather than individual Themes.

Decisions in this category were mainly evaluative; although this type of chain relates to textual organisation, factors more closely connected to overall language competence also influence success. Many of these links were first judged unsuccessful, but later accepted, as the research focus is the development of structure and cohesion, rather than general language ability. There are instances, though, where the meaning may be unclear for native English speakers outside the research context, but accessible to those (such as the researcher) accustomed to operating within a non-native speaker setting. For the sake of consistency and reliability, criteria were established for all texts, but took into account group level where necessary. Below, for example, although a CAE student might be expected to put *this* instead of *it*, at level 3 the link was judged successful:

**a lot of students** copy information from the internet. **It** could be a big problem (**L3 cont post**)



Expectations of what constitutes successful linking at different levels varies, and implicit in the use of the classroom materials within the experimental phase is the idea that students at different stages in their learning can access the same content. The exercises and explanations which constitute part of this material, together with the scaffolding provided by the teacher, facilitate this.

Where a wrong choice confuses the meaning, the link was discounted:

One current innovation in our educational studies system is Bologna program. Which this system (UNSUCCESSFUL) it is supposed that ... (CAE cont pre)

The following link was originally discounted, but later accepted. It is initially confusing, because everyone leads the reader astray. The error, however, is mainly typographical, and the intended meaning (*every one*, for *each*) is retrievable and probably acceptable at level 3:

Currently, there are three methods of assessment for students: a final exam, coursework assessment and a mixture of both. Everyone have many advantatges and disadvantatges (L3 ex pre)

Below, the link was finally judged successful because the tense error in the (projected) Theme does not affect the flow of Rheme-Theme.

Personally, I would like to practise more listening and grammar but I know that if the teacher would do it, we wouldn't speak a lot (L3 ex pre)

Connections are sometimes achieved but are less immediate for the reader, as in the examples below:

Another **advantage** is *that* **you** can send your works **by email to your university teachers** so **it's easy** for them and for you (L3 ex post)

**students** can try if they want to do **a final exam, a coursework assessment or a mixture of both**. *In my opinion, I think that* **all of this methods** are good (L3 ex pre)

(The intervening Interpersonal Themes (*In my opinion, I think*) may be distracting).

Where embedded clauses separate the main element in the Rheme (here **the final exam**)

from the following Theme, the link may still be established, if not especially smoothly:

(students) ... have **the final exam to motivate them to achieve good results**. *Moreover,* **the final exam** is an opportunity (CAE ex pre)

Across all texts, though, there is probably a cline rather than a clear division between successful and unsuccessful.

In some cases, two Themes are generated from one Rheme:

depends **the age of the students**. *For example* **in the university** sometimes it's better to do a final exam *and* **in the school** (L3 cont pre)

*I think that* **it's** depends of **the subject**. *I think that* **if the subject is very practice** I would do a coursework assessment. **If the subject is theoretic** I think that is better to do an exam (L3 cont pre)

Punctuation errors were normally ignored, as in the following example. Here, the flow of the text is interrupted, because of confusion between defining and non-defining clauses:

*First of all,* **there is** the **traditional assessment** **where** the pupils ought to study only for the final exam (CAE cont pre)

*To sum up,* **there is** the **mixture of both** **which** joins the advantages of both (CAE cont pre)

Other decisions concerned the inclusion of links to Textual Themes. The literature offers little guidance, the clearest coming from Butt et al. (2001:149), who comment that ‘we can also use textual Themes to make the connection between clauses clear’. The Textual Theme links were, therefore, ultimately included in the analysis, where the link is made either in the absence of a Topical Theme

we all would like to be assessed in a different way, in order to avoid what we have to deal with (CAE cont pre)

or because the Rheme links with the *Textual* Theme more strongly than with the **Topical**:

there is people who usually have an economical extra support (for example, of his parents) and, for this reason, they have more free time for doing their coursework. (CAE cont pre)

#### 4.1.2.3 Derived (Split) Themes

Derived or split Themes are identified across the literature, and despite differences, they seem often to coincide. Bloor and Bloor (2004) discuss a split Rheme pattern and derived Themes, while Er (2001) has zig-zag and multiple Theme/Rheme. McCabe (1999) describes a split Theme and split Rheme, and Butt et al. (2001) illustrate this without naming it. One of the clearest models for analysis is Moore’s derived Theme, which he describes as taking its name ‘from the clauses in a stretch of text (typically a paragraph) deriving, but not repeating, their Themes from the Theme and Rheme of the first clause. This ... is familiar to college composition teachers under the term “topic sentence”, which can also be referred to as a “hypertheme”’ (Moore, 2006:47).



McCabe (ibid.) includes this Theme type in constant Theme chains: '... for the sake of consistency in analysis, derived Theme has not been taken into account as a thematic progression type in this study' (1999:174). The present study considers this progression type, though, because it appears in several of the texts, and seems to illustrate an organisational device different from that of a constant Theme chain.

Although split Themes were used initially, there is a cross-over with derived, and for longer sections of text the latter seemed more appropriate. A distinction is not made here between topics presented first in Theme or Rheme: the criterion is rather that the ideas are later taken up and dealt with systematically in Themes at intervals during the text. Links were not counted unless the sense of progression is clear, and were judged as **partly successful** in cases where the Theme (or Rheme) can be retrieved, but with difficulty. Where a text seemed about to develop a system of derived Themes, but these fizzle out or are explored Rhematically rather than Thematically, they were judged **unsuccessful (U)**:

**When you have to choose an assessment for students**, you can choose between **three different methods**. **All three methods** could be good, *but* **some** require more time than others.

*Firstly*, **we** can mention **the final exam method**

*On the other hand*, **it** exists a coursework **assessment possibility**

**The last option** would be having a mixture between the two methods. **(CAE ex pre)**

**Derived Theme:** (begins, but does not develop) **(U)**

A lack of control of Themes and Rhemes here prevents the reader from being taken through a clear exploration of each method.

The use of derived Themes is sometimes difficult to assess, because both composition titles (pre- and post-test) intrinsically require a consideration of competing sides of an argument; the writing therefore necessarily reflects this, facilitating derived Themes. It is unclear sometimes whether Themes are derived or simply part of a Constant Theme chain (cf McCabe, above). This may be, however, the nature of this Theme type, which is more intimately bound up with the structure of longer stretches of text.

#### *4.1.3 Discussion: Topical, Textual or Interpersonal?*

Language items which reoccurred across texts and which were seemingly related but nonetheless difficult to assign immediately or exclusively to a specific Theme type, were grouped together, as described above. The resulting 6 categories, explored below, were not therefore pre-determined, but rather emerged from the analysis. Sometimes decisions regarding the final interpretation were made from among diverse options in the literature, and sometimes no very clear guidance was available. In all cases, the linguistic choices 'both reflect and construct different contexts' (Thompson, 2004:248) and the Themes should be understood not as isolated units, but as part of a text.

##### *Group 1: reference with demonstrative 'this'*

Some of these expressions are analysed as Textual. They fulfil the role of Conjunctive Adjuncts (when Thematic) as interpreted by Lock (1996:230), who sees them as establishing a framework for understanding the meaning of the clause by relating it to what comes before. Thompson (2004:182) recognizes this role and its importance in text

organization. He comments that *this* often accompanies a noun, ‘encapsulating the content of what has been said’, but does not explore the similarities with Circumstances, discussed below.

**for this reason** is analysed as Textual (cf Halliday, 1985:50), seeming to fit with the description of Conjunctive Adjuncts offered by Bloor and Bloor (2004:53). Eggins (2004:48) has it as a causal conjunction.

**this way** (meaning *in this way*) was initially analysed as Topical, with the missing preposition creating the feel of a noun phrase. It was then re-described as Textual, because the anaphoric referencing is the main function.

**this method** is described here as a participant. Slightly distanced from the preceding clauses by an interpersonal Theme (*I think*), unlike the examples above, the main function is to establish a point of departure for what follows.

## *Group 2: Interpersonal Themes and grammatical metaphor*

Where grammatical metaphors occur in the interpersonal component of a text, this is associated with Theme choice (cf Halliday, 1985), and this category includes items such as *I believe, I think*. In some instances, the pronoun alone is analysed as Topical Theme (cf Thompson 2004), but in others (*I think that, I strongly believe, I find that*) the whole item is taken as Interpersonal Theme.

Thompson (ibid.:172) identifies *I think that* as an ‘interactional Theme’, because it deals with both experiential meanings and interpersonal relationships. He describes two Themes in an example text as interpersonal rather than experiential because ‘the Adjunct

expresses the standpoint' (ibid:168). One of these is 'emotionally', in the sentence 'Emotionally, nursing is one of the most satisfying of professions' (ibid:80). The analysis might be contentious ('emotionally' may relate more to the effect on the nurse, rather than to standpoint), but the example nonetheless highlights the complexity of this type of interpersonal/experiential meaning. Halliday (1985) offers some insight, by identifying two possible interpretations of these constructions: the literal (or congruent), and the metaphorical. The former assigns pronoun as Theme and verb as Rheme, whereas the metaphorical version has the complete expression as Theme. The modality is expressed through a Head clause (such as *I think* or *I believe*), while the thesis follows in a dependent clause. Halliday proposes the inclusion of both versions in analyses, but this study adopts the metaphorical version (cf Eggins, 2004, and Thompson, ibid.) for the sake of consistency, and also because the interpersonal meaning seems thus more effectively conveyed.

*In conclusion, I think internet it's a good option for my university studies (L3 post)*

### *Group 3: thematised comment and existential 'there'*

Not dealt with extensively in the literature, Thematised comment (Thompson 2004) is a Thematic choice with widespread use among scripts here. Thompson (2004) comments that this Theme type is often used at transition points in the text, thus contributing fundamentally to Thematic progression.

For existential *there*, decisions again centred on whether to analyse the whole item as Theme: Thomson (ibid.) includes all, while Halliday (ibid.), Eggins (2004), and Bloor and



Bloor (2004) have *there* only as Topical Theme. Eggins (ibid:313) asserts that 'an exception to the rule that a topical Theme will always carry a Transitivity label is found in the case of existential processes'. Thompson, however, (ibid.:161) argues that Theme should include 'experiential content', and this approach is used here, mainly because, as with *it* above, the Thematic choices made by the writer seem better conveyed.

**It's necessary, it's impossible, it's better, it is true** are all analysed as Thematised comment.

**it's important to know that** was analysed as Thematised comment. Butt et al. (2001:242) illustrate appraisal, with *as we all know* 'used to position the reader in agreement with the writer', and the meaning here is similar.

Sometimes the context results in distinct analyses of apparently congruent items: **it's better** is analysed as Thematised comment in the first example below, but not the second, where it does not involve two clauses (here, the *it* refers anaphorically to coursework assessment). **It is not easy** in the example below is Thematised comment, but **is easier** is analysed as a normal Topical Theme (with error), as although it conveys a viewpoint, **I think** takes Thematic position.

**Some people** say **it is better** to evaluate the knowledge of a student by giving the student a final exam (CAE ex, pre)

**With this method** you don't have time to relax. ... But **it's better**, in my opinion, *because* you have more possibilities for have a good mark. (L3 cont, pre)

**It is not easy** to define **which criteria and methods** are the best (CAE cont, pre)

**I think** *that* **is easier** to know *if* you has learnt that subject or not. (L3 ex, pre)



Elsewhere, uncertainty was sometimes linked to the absence of features such as intonation, or to elements more easily dealt with within Contrastive Analysis:

**It's different** in the following (L3) example is analysed as Thematic comment, as seeming to capture the development of the text better

**a lot of students** don't like this method *because* **it** implicate *that* **you** have to study and work every day. **It's different** if you only have a final exam (**L3 ex, pre**)

(cf Thompson, 2004) but it lies somewhere between existential and interpersonal meaning. Perhaps intonation would be necessary for certainty. Intonation plays a central part in meaning, for 'English is a language in which a relatively heavy semantic load is carried by rhythm and intonation' (Halliday, 1985:270), but is not part of this study.

**It's probably** (meaning *it's probable*). A Thematic comment analysis acknowledges the Spanish way of expressing modality (easier for an L1 Spanish speaker to manage than modals), thus reflecting the intended emphasis (cf *at least*, below).

#### *Group 4: Circumstances and dependent clauses*

Many of these are non-finite or finite dependent clauses, or Circumstances. It was often difficult to decide whether to analyse the item as a Circumstance (and if so, which type), or as a dependent clause or even sometimes as a Thematized comment. Thompson (2004) suggests that we may need to adapt the way we analyse clause complexes, so as to describe more clearly the functional differences between interpersonal and circumstantial clauses. His idea of a 'cline' (ibid.:111), 'with a message being expressed either as a separate independent clause, or as a dependent clause in a clause complex, or

as a circumstance inside a clause', illustrates the differences and similarities and also the complexities of these features. The following examples were revised several times.

**However, being in a public school where attendance is not obligatory and where usually there is no coursework** can lead the student to lower his concentration (CAE cont, pre)

This is a non-finite embedded 'heavy' subject as Theme (cf Thompson, *ibid.*:144, Bloor and Bloor, 2004:165).

**Depending on the kind of studies** it will be better one method or another (CAE ex, pre)

This is analysed as Circumstantial Adjunct: Eggins (2004:358) has Circumstance of Manner, but Butt et al. (2001:65) have Contingency (a category not in Eggins). This could be analysed also as a non-finite dependent clause.

**In our present educational system,** the discussion about which method is better for assessment students has taken an important place (CAE ex, pre)

Initially analysed as Circumstance of angle, this was then described as a Marked Theme. Eggins, though (*ibid.*:358), has '*in most infants*' as a Circumstance of location, and it was ultimately analysed as such.

### *Group 5: Textual and Interpersonal*

This group comprises language items often analysed as Textual, but which carry also much interpersonal meaning. Halliday and Hasan (1976) discuss the difficulties of

deciding whether to interpret cohesion in terms of the experiential function of language or the interpersonal function. They suggest the terms *external* and *internal* to refer to both.

When we use conjunction as a means of creating text, we may exploit either the relations that are inherent in the phenomena that language is used to talk about, or those that are inherent in the communication process, in the forms of interaction between speaker and hearer.

Halliday and Hasan (1976:240-241)

Eggs (2004) also draws a distinction between internal and external conjunctive relations.

**So, is it** possible to demonstrate in an exam of one or two hours **that he** deserves to pass the subject? (CAE cont, pre)

**so** is given as a Textual Theme (a co-ordinator) by Halliday (1985:51); nonetheless, Halliday and Hasan's comments (ibid.) are relevant here, and it is analysed as Interpersonal, as embedded in the communication process. Although Halliday's list (ibid.:51) of co-ordinators and subordinators was used to check Textual Conjunctions, sometimes other meanings dominate.

**at least** is also analysed as Textual by Halliday, but the use below is unclear. The intended meaning is probably closer to *at last* (*al final*) in Spanish, corresponding to the English *in the end*, with an interpersonal meaning. The example is given within the full context:

**That's** why **coursework assessment** can be a solution to make students understand that educate yourself is a continuous process. *Furthermore*, **give it all to one card** it's a lost of chances to the real potencial of the student. *At least* **you** are just evaluating the capacity of facing an exam *and* **there are** lots of skills which don't care ... for example, team-work or talking exposition hability. (CAE ex, pre)

**now** meaning 'nowadays'. Thompson has this variously, as Textual (2004:176, 270), and as Circumstance (location; time) (ibid.:131). Butt *et al.* (2001) describe it as Interpersonal, and it is usually analysed this way here.

### *Group 6: miscellaneous*

This group includes Themes which at first sight are fairly disparate, and do not fit into the groups above. Halliday and Hasan (1976) comment that cohesion is realised through a variety of features, grouped together in SFL grammar books (unlike traditional grammars). This is true here, for both the materials and the analysis.

**academically** was originally analysed as a Marked Theme (Circumstance) (Butt *et al.* 2001:65), in line with Lock's (1996) description of Thematized Circumstantial Adjuncts. It was ultimately, however, interpreted as Interpersonal, following Downing and Lock's (2002:234) description of Domain Adjuncts (a subset of Adjuncts of Stance) 'which limit the domain of reference for the rest of the sentence'.

**Academically**, it is positive for the student *as* **it** is a good opportunity (CAE cont, pre)

**actually** is described as a Mood Adjunct of Intensity (i.e. with an interpersonal function) by Halliday (1985:82) and Bloor and Bloor (2004:57). Downing and Lock (2002:238)



analyse it as a continuative Theme (a type of interpersonal), used at transition points in the text. The intended meaning here is probably *now*, with the error deriving from the Spanish *actualment* (meaning *now*), and so it is analysed as Circumstance of location (time):

*Actually*, the teachers aren't ready to make a great coursework assessment (L3 ex, pre)

**anyway** Downing and Lock (ibid.) describe this as Textual (a connective adjunct), while Halliday and Hasan (1976:270) discuss it in detail as a continuative. It is analysed as Textual here, but with reservations, as the interpersonal meaning seems closer to items such as *actually* (above).

Anyway, I think that the best choice is that universities let the students choose their assessment methods (CAE cont, pre)

The aim here has been to describe and clarify the process of analysis carried out with the pre-test compositions and then replicated post-test. By establishing a coherent and clear methodology, this stage of the research laid the foundations for as reliable and consistent a comparison as possible between the two sets of scripts. Following this procedure, data were selected for addressing the main research questions.

#### 4.2 Qualitative data: questionnaires and teacher feedback

In order to analyse qualitative information from the questionnaires, responses were typed up and numbered (making it easier to refer back to the original data), and then categorised according to question and topic. This brought together data from all levels,

including level 4. Where several responses seemed to express the same idea, questionnaire numbers were noted, creating categories describing recurring patterns and topics. In order to track and interpret reactions across levels, responses and numbers were coloured by group: black for level 3, red for level 4, green for CAE:

**Table 4.2** Categorising questionnaire data

response	questionnaire number
I'm better at writing	1, 2, 10, 11, 4, 3, 5, 6
I have learned to use connectors	2, 4, 13
The coursebook is easier than the materials	1, 9, 11
I have learned how to organize ideas in a correct way and how to link them and structure them inside a text	CAE

Results were then related to the research questions and classroom materials. The extent to which student comments here coincided with teacher feedback was also explored.

Written feedback during the course mainly comprised teachers' notes which were made after the first four classes and then forwarded to the researcher. These notes commented on student reaction to the classes, suggesting changes which might improve the effectiveness of the material when used again. The two experimental groups were taught more or less in parallel, but on different days, so that there was occasionally enough time to make revisions between classes, as described above. The feedback was not always positive but it was constructive and considered.

Discussing the analysis of qualitative interview data, Cohen et al. (2006:282) assert that it is 'less a completely accurate representation (as in the numerical, positivist tradition) but more of a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualised data that are already interpretations of a social encounter'. This is true here of the teacher feedback (written and oral), and also of the student questionnaire data: it was important to bear in mind the danger of inferring meaning, especially in an L2 context, where ideas might be expressed with difficulty, and also to refer back systematically to the original data, to ensure that meanings were not lost or altered as the process developed.

## Chapter 5: results

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The presentation of results is organised into quantitative and qualitative. The former includes Theme type and Thematic progression and the latter describes findings from the questionnaires and teacher feedback. One example script from each level is given below, to establish a framework of reference for the following discussion before entering upon a more detailed analysis. These examples show Thematic choice and progression patterns in combination and within complete texts, so that the shorter extracts which appear throughout the rest of the report are easier to contextualise and understand. They also convey an idea of the average text length and language level for each group.

### CAE ex, post

The use of the internet for our university studies is really helpful. Everybody can receive the information on the net, *without* moving from their homes.

There can be no doubt that new technologies have arrived. Using the internet for studies is a very powerful tool. If you have to do some research, there you have the internet to provide you all the necessary information. Nowadays, almost all universities have an intranet, inside, (UNSUCCESSFUL) you can find all the information you need as a student, timetables, types of exam or notes.

There are those who argue that the use that we make of the internet is outrageous. We are leaving books or encyclopedias at one side, and (ellipsed Theme) only use computers or cell phones. Everything is easier, with just a click you can find it everywhere.

To sum up, the internet is a very useful tool for university studies, it makes things easier, but we have to try and not use it in too much extent.



**L3 ex, post**

**Nowadays** there are a increase of using the internet for university studies. **I think there are** some advantages and disadvantages.

*On one hand*, **with internet** you can have the information faster and easier. **It** is actualised **at the same time that the teacher** put in the webpage. **It** facilitate the communication with the students and with the teacher. *Moreover* **you** have a lot of information online. **You** can find all that you want. **Thank internet and computers** it's not necessary to carry on with a lot of books. **The students** can have all information in a little memory.

*On the other hand*, **maybe not everybody** have a computer and internet at home. **But if this is your case**, in the university you have a **computer's room where** you can use them free. **"In interne you have all you want** , **but this** could be a disadvantage *because the students* could waste the time looking for an other thinks or playing games **and they** don't study.

*I conclusion*, **I think there are** more advantages than disadvantages *and internet* is very useful and necessary.

**5.1 Quantitative results**

The number of compositions analysed was:

**Table 5.1** Compositions

group	pre-test compositions	post-test compositions
CAE experimental	13	3
CAE control	12	7
L3 experimental	19	11
L3 control	13	10

Given the discrepancy in numbers between pre- and post-test scripts, results are, where appropriate, expressed both numerically and in percentages. As with the questionnaires, fewer post-test data were collected than anticipated, as some students were absent.

5.1.1 Theme Type

Numbers and percentages of Themes for pre- and post-test compositions were calculated. Similar tables to those below were compiled for all groups (see Appendix 11).

Table 5.2 Theme tables

Averages	CAE experimental pre-test totals (13 scripts)	CAE experimental post-test totals (3 scripts)
Average number of words per script	251	221
Average number of Interpersonal Themes per script	2.8	0
Average number of Textual Themes per script	12.6	9.33
Average number of Topical Themes per script	16.6	18.33

Results for all groups are illustrated graphically below.

### 5.1.1.1 Interpersonal Themes

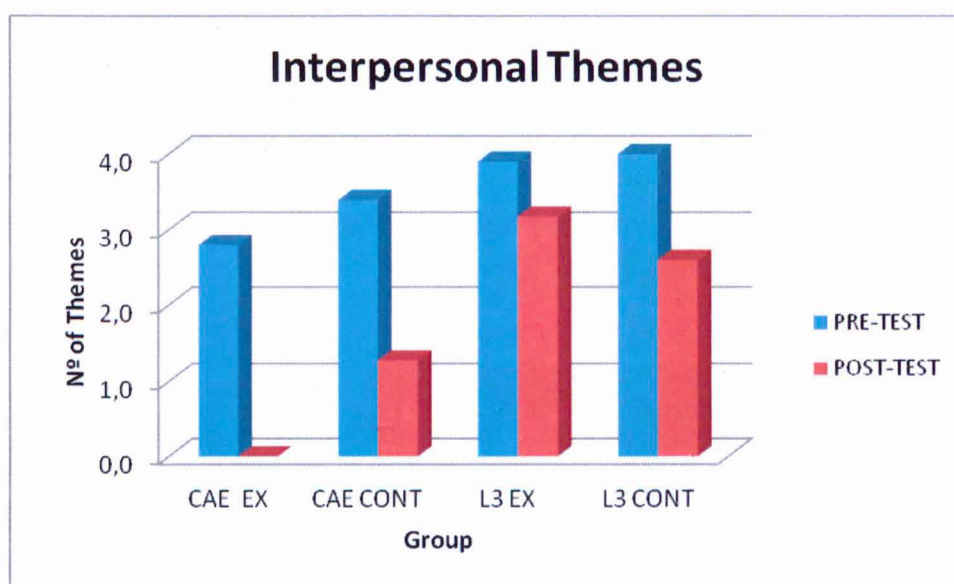


Figure 5.1 Interpersonal Themes

Results show Interpersonal Themes decreasing across all groups, but most markedly for CAE experimental, where this Theme type disappeared post-test.

This is the category with greatest differences between pre- and post-test scores. It illustrates also more effect at higher than at lower levels (cf cross-referential progression, below), perhaps indicating complexity, and raising questions regarding accessibility for lower-level students. For all texts (across levels), the average number of Interpersonal Themes per text is pre-test: **2.22**, post-test: **1.45**. For CAE experimental, the most common Interpersonal Themes pre-test, not in evidence post-test, were those directly concerned with giving opinion. These are used more than Themes for 'hedging', discussed below. *Sometimes* and *maybe* appear less than *I think* and *in my opinion*, in both pre- and post-test scripts across all groups except CAE experimental. The initial study indicated a non-native reliance upon modal and comment Adjuncts, rather than Modal Finites as Theme, to express position within an argument. Although the focus here is not specifically

on modality, results seem to echo this preference for devices other than Modal Finites (see *Discussion*, below).

The average numbers of pre- and post-test Interpersonal Themes are shown in table 5.3, with the greatest differences between the two sets of scores highlighted.

**Table 5.3** Average number of **Interpersonal** Themes per script

group	Pre-test	Post-test
CAE Experimental	2.8	0
CAE Control	3.4	1.3
L3 Experimental	3.9	3.2
L3 Control	4	2.6

The most common Interpersonal Themes are given in tables 5.4 and 5.5, with percentages showing levels of Theme use within each group.

**Table 5.4** Pre-test **Interpersonal** Themes

	I think	in my opinion	maybe	sometimes
CAE ex (total 37 Themes)	10 (27%)	6 (16%)	3 (8%)	0
CAE cont (42)	4 (9.5%)	6 (14%)	0	2 (5%)
3A ex (74)	37 (50%)	10 (13.5%)	5 (7%)	1 (1%)
L3 cont (52)	29 (55.7%)	6 (11.5%)	2 (4%)	6 (11.5%)
Total instances	80	28	10	9



Table 5.5 Post-test **Interpersonal** Themes

	<b>I think</b>	<b>in my opinion</b>	<b>sometimes</b>	<b>For me/from my point of view/</b>
<b>CAE ex</b> (total 0 Themes)	0	0	0	0
<b>CAE cont</b> (9)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	0	1 (11%)
<b>L3 ex</b> (35)	14 (40%)	6 (17%)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)
<b>L3 cont</b> (26)	8 (31%)	2 (8%)	6 (23%)	2 (8%)
Total instances	23	10	8	4

5.1.1.2 Textual Themes

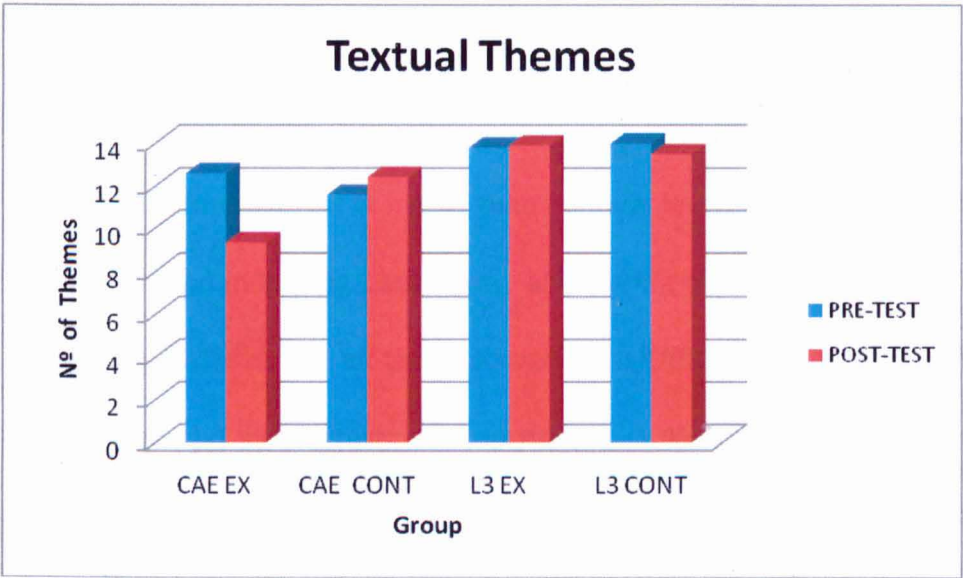


Figure 5.2 Textual Themes

Results indicate stability within the numbers of Textual Themes, except in the case of the CAE experimental group, where these Themes decreased. As indicated above, the initial study found a greater reliance on this Theme type among non-native speakers than among native speakers, and this is explored further in chapters 6 and 7. Textual Theme choices also remained fairly consistent and similar for both groups at both levels, apart from *because* and *that*. An increase in *that* is mirrored by a corresponding decrease in *because* across groups except for level 3 control where *that* increases only very slightly.

Tables 5.6 and 5.7 show results for number and type of Textual Themes for pre- and post-test scripts.

**Table 5.6** Average number of *Textual* Themes per script

group	Pre-test	Post-test
CAE experimental	12.6	9.3
CAE control	11.6	12.3
L3 experimental	13.8	13.4
L3 control	14	13.8

**Table 5.7** Numbers of most common Textual Themes across all texts

Pre-test		Post-test	
and	143	that	87
because	122	and	64
that	97	but	43
but	80	because	32
on the other hand	21	so	16
so	25	on the other hand	15
however	20	if	15
in conclusion	20	also	12
if	16	in conclusion	11
in order to	11	however	7
moreover	11		

Scores and percentages for the main Textual Themes for each group are shown in tables 5.8 - 5.11, below. Red highlighted areas indicate where the greatest changes have occurred: these centre on the use of *because* and *that*, the implications of which are discussed in chapter 6.

**Table 5.8** CAE Experimental main Textual Themes

<i>CAE Experimental pre-test</i>		<i>CAE Experimental post-test</i>	
because	20 (11.83%)	that	6 (25%)
and	19 (11.24%)	but	3 (12.5%)
that	19 (11.24%)	and	3 (12.5%)
but	18 (10.65%)	however	3 (12.5%)
however	10 (5.91%)	as	2 (8.3%)

**Table 5.9** CAE Control main Textual Themes

<i>CAE Control pre-test</i>		<i>CAE Control post-test</i>	
that 21	(14.28%)	that	25 (29%)
and	17 (11.56%)	and	10 (11.6%)
because	12 (8.16%)	but	7 (8.13%)
but	9 (6.125)	on the other hand	5 (5.81%)
however	7 (4.76%)	if	5 (5.81%)
on the other hand	7 (4.76%)		
so	7 (4.76%)		



**Table 5.10** Level 3 Experimental main Textual Themes

<i>Level 3 Experimental pre-test</i>		<i>Level 3 Experimental post-test</i>	
and	70 (26.92%)	that	34 (22.36%)
because	51 (19.61%)	and	32 (21.05%)
but	33 (12.69%)	because	16 (10.52%)
that	30 (11.53%)	but	15 (9.865)
if	17 (6.53%)	on the other hand	7 (4.6%)
		so	7 (4.6%)

**Table 5.11** Level 3 Control main Textual Themes

<i>Level 3 Control pre-test</i>		<i>Level 3 Control post-test</i>	
because	37 (20.32%)	that	22 (16.4%)
and	37 (20.32%)	and	21 (15.67%)
that	26 (14.28%)	but	18 (13.43%)
but	21 (11.53%)	because	16 (11.94%)
so	11 (6.04%)	also	9 (6.71%)

**5.1.1.3 Marked Themes**

Results of the division of Marked Themes for CAE Experimental are illustrated in Tables 5.12 and 5.13, below. This information was compiled for both levels, and tables for other groups are included in Appendix 12. The main differences between pre- and post-test results are highlighted.

**Table 5.12** CAE Experimental Pre-Test Marked Themes

% of Topical Themes: <b>32.4%</b> (total Marked Themes: <b>70</b> , total Topical Themes: <b>216</b> )	
CIRCUM (C)	<b>15 (21.42%)</b> Location (time) <b>6</b> location (place) <b>3</b> status, role <b>1</b> extent <b>2</b> manner <b>2</b> contingency <b>1</b>
THEMATISED COMMENT (TC)	<b>10 (14.28%)</b>
DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC)	<b>15 (21.42%)</b>
HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses)	<b>24 (34.28%)</b>
NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF)	<b>6 (8.57%)</b>

**Table 5.13** CAE Experimental Post-Test Marked Themes

CAE EXPERIMENTAL POST-TEST MARKED THEMES	
% of Topical Themes: <b>38.18 %</b> (total Marked Themes: <b>21</b> , total Topical Themes: <b>55</b> )	
CIRCUM (C)	<b>6 (28.57 %)</b> Location (time) <b>3</b> location (place) <b>1</b> status, role <b>0</b> extent <b>0</b> manner (means) <b>2</b> contingency <b>0</b>
THEMATISED COMMENT (TC)	<b>2 (9.52%)</b>
DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC)	<b>3 (14.28%)</b>
HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses)	<b>7 (33.33%)</b>
NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF)	<b>3 (14.28%)</b>

Overall numbers of Marked Themes as percentages of Topical Themes increased post-test for CAE experimental, while level 3 experimental remained stable. CAE control exhibited a slight increase, while level 3 control decreased (from **31%** to **15%**). The average numbers of Marked Themes per text therefore increased at CAE level (slightly more for the experimental group, from **5.38** to **7**), and decreased at level 3, especially in the control group (**6.4** to **3.2**).

Percentages of Thematized Comment as Marked Theme decreased overall except at level 3 control, and the average number per script decreased in all cases. Circumstantial Themes almost doubled for CAE experimental, from **1.1** pre-test average to **2** post-test. CAE control showed a smaller increase (**1.25** to **1.57**), while Circumstantial Themes decreased for level 3 groups.

The biggest changes involved dependent and non-finite clauses, and are illustrated graphically below. Dependent clauses as Marked Theme dropped across all groups (see cross-referential progression, below), while for the two experimental groups the use of non-finite clauses as Marked Theme increased noticeably. This rise expressed as a percentage of Marked Themes was especially manifest in the level 3 experimental group: **2.94 %** to **16.98%**.

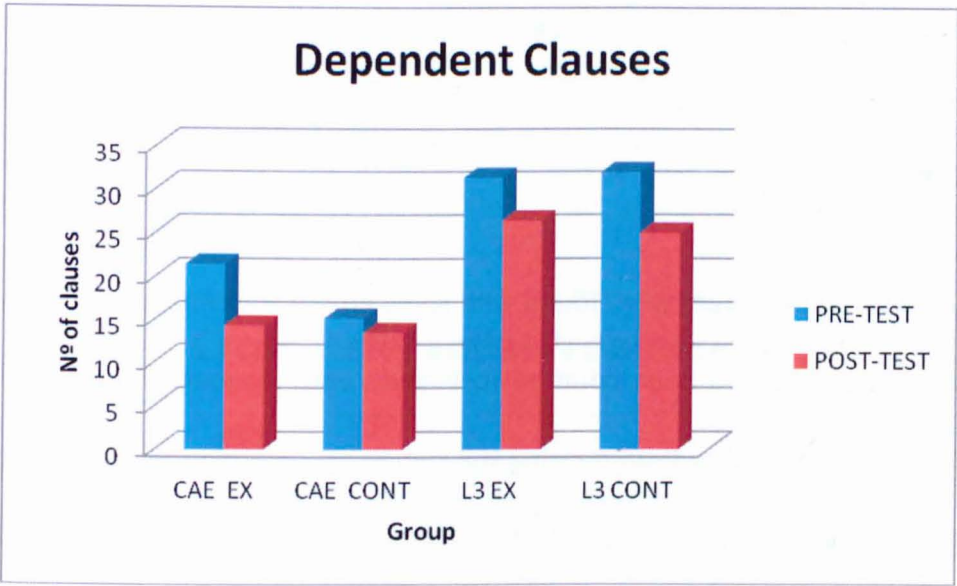


Figure 5.3 Dependent clauses as Marked Theme

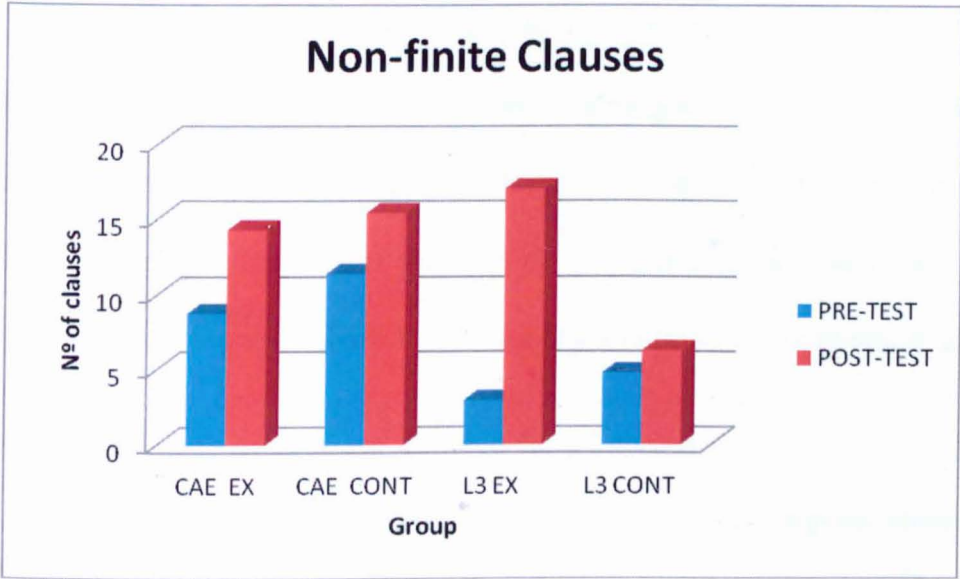


Figure 5.4 Non-finite clauses as Marked Theme

5.1.2 Thematic Progression

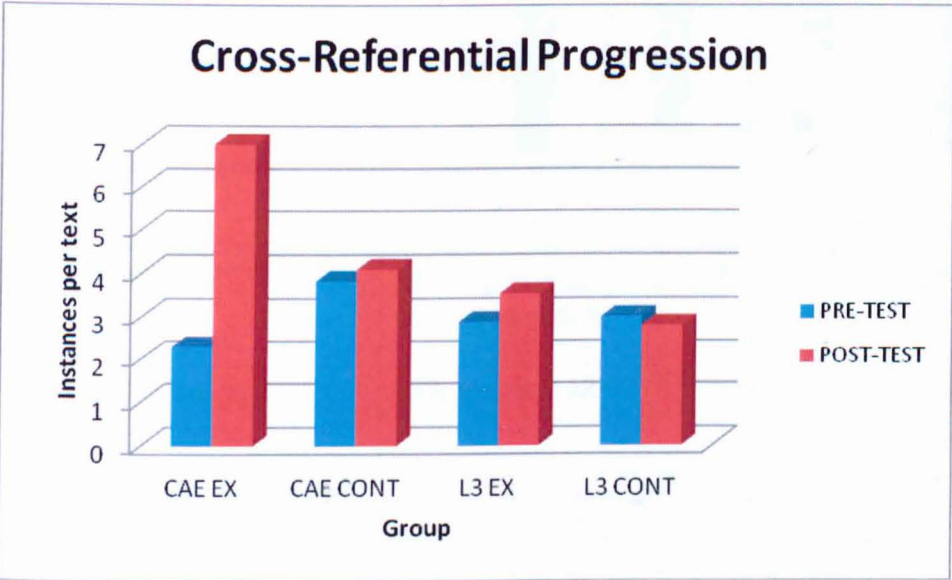
Patterns of Thematic progression results for the initial study were later repeated in the main study, but this time between experimental and control groups.

### ***5.1.2.1 Cross-Referential***

During the analysis procedure, errors were found with some cross-referential progression totals. Some post-test scripts had been counted to include each language item in the cross-referential progression, rather than treating the two items creating the link as one instance, and some dependent clauses were missing from the final number. The graphs were modified, and this revision process triggered a more concentrated examination of dependent clauses and a revised decision regarding the inclusion or otherwise of unsuccessful attempts at cross-referential progression. These decisions are discussed in chapter 6; it is assumed that this progression type will become more manageable and will be used more appropriately as learning progresses, and that initial attempts to construct a coherent text will not always succeed. Nonetheless, the research aims to examine the present impact on student writing and also to consider the potential effect and the willingness of the student to incorporate new ideas, even if these ideas are not yet wholly assimilated.

Results for Thematic progression show higher numbers of post-test cross-referential Themes for both CAE groups, but especially for CAE experimental, with an increase of **2.3** to **7**, compared with **3.83** to **4.1** for CAE control. An increase is also evident for level 3 experimental (**2.89** to **3.54**), but not for the control group, where this progression type decreases slightly (**3** to **2.8**). The rise in the average number of post-test cross-referential Themes was therefore consistently higher for experimental groups. The inclusion of unsuccessful attempts increased levels markedly for both experimental groups, while level 3 control post-test, containing no unsuccessful attempts, was unaffected.

As a component of cross-referential progression, the number of dependent clauses increased across all groups, most noticeably for level 3 experimental (**7.27%** to **20.51%**).

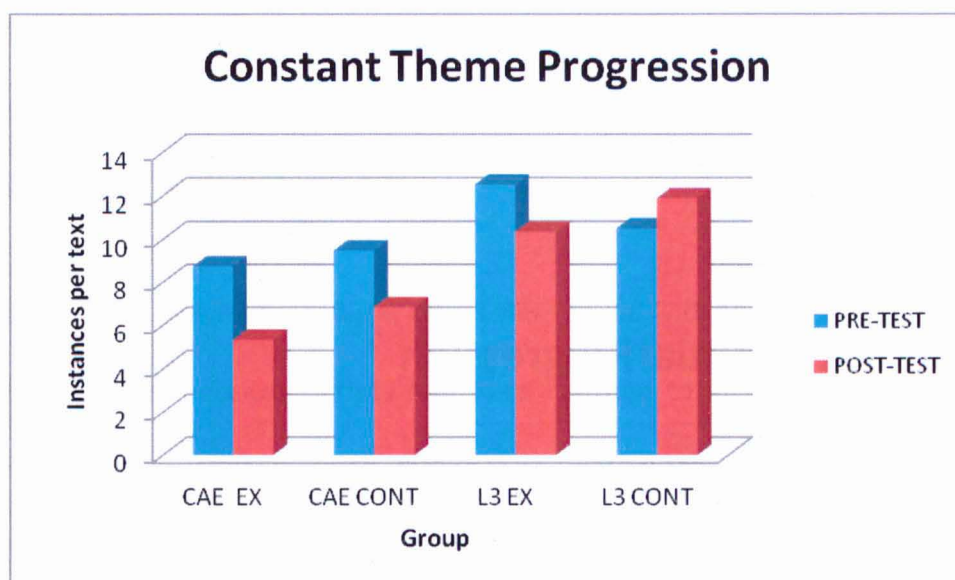


**Figure 5.5** Cross-Referential Progression

**5.1.2.2 Constant**

Constant Theme progression declined for all groups except level 3 control, with a CAE experimental post-test decrease from **2.61** to **1.33** and a much smaller CAE control decrease (**2.16** to **2**). Level 3 experimental also decreased slightly.





**Figure 5.6** Constant Theme Progression

Very long chains are almost always simple Themes, and usually pronouns. Thematic chains below are in dark blue:

**You** can use internet to search information, (missing Theme – it) is quick *but sometimes* it's dangerous *because the information* is not true. **You** have to trust with the place where you find the information, **some webs** give a false information that *it's* not fiable **you** have to be sure.

Also, **using internet** you can find a lot of information with different languages, *or you* can find photos quickly *if you* need it for a work from university. **I think it's** a good place to change information with your classmates and find a lot of documents.

**There are** disadvantages of using internet too. **Some students** don't have internet in their house, so **they** have to go always on the library or some place *that* there is internet. So **they** have to do the work *always on the day*, *because if there is some imprevist* they can't connect to internet.

**Another disadvantage** is *that you* can't trust with *all the information from internet*. *Sometimes it* can be false. So **you** always have to resificate *if it's* fiable.

(L3 cont, post)

5.1.2.3 Cross-Referential and Constant

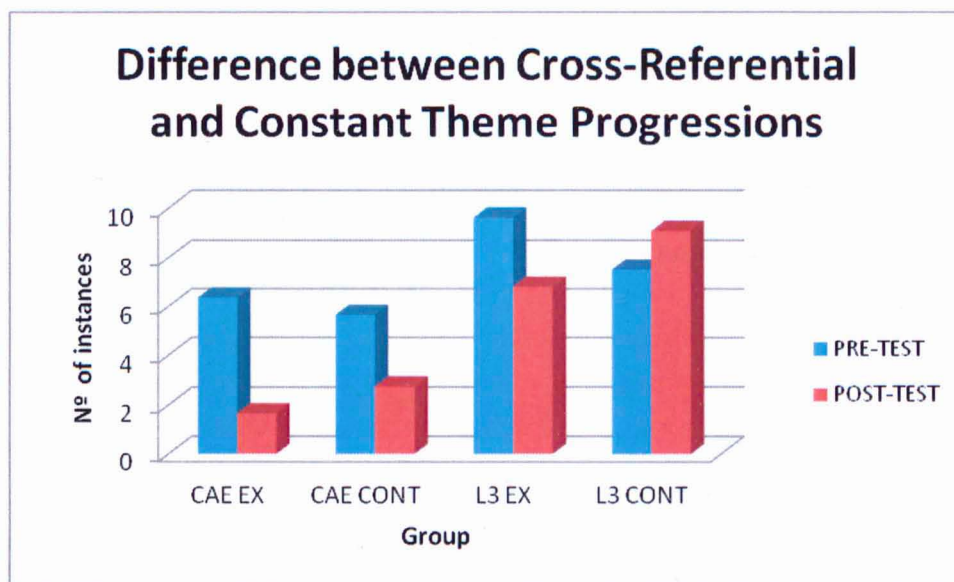
Thematic progression results for L3 are given below. Again, these tables were compiled for both levels, and are included in Appendix 13.

Table 5.14 L3 Thematic Progression

Thematic progression type	L3 Experimental pre-test totals (19 scripts)	L3 Experimental post-test totals (11 scripts)
Constant Theme pattern	238: average 12.52	114: average 10.36
Linear (zig-zag) Theme pattern	55 (4 U) average: not including U 2.68, including 2.89	39 (1 U): average: not including U 3.45, including 3.54
Derived Theme	YES: 3 NO: 11 2 PS: 2 U: 3	YES: 1 PS: 6 U: 1 NO: 3

Cross-referential and constant Theme progression totals for each group except level 3 control moved closer together after the classroom input. As constant Theme progression was much more prevalent in all pre-test scripts, this means that for all groups except level 3 control, total instances of cross-referential progression were higher post-test. The difference between the two progression types for CAE experimental group, was reduced from 6.37 to 1.77 (average number of instances), indicating a more equal distribution. The gap also narrowed for CAE control.





**Figure 5.7** Difference between Cross-Referential and Constant Theme Progressions

#### 5.1.2.4 Derived

Derived Theme was generally used little, although more post-test, and especially by experimental groups. All attempts, however successful, are included.

**Table 5.15** Derived Theme averages

group	pre-test averages	post-test averages
CAE experimental	0.46	1
CAE control	0.5	0.57
L3 experimental	0.36	0.72
L3 control	0.38	0.4

Bloor and Bloor (2004) limit the definition to expressions in Theme position, but the present study includes topics presented first in Theme or Rheme: **75%** of pre-test and

76% of post-test derived Themes are introduced Rhematically rather than Thematically, with varying levels of success. Results show an increase which is higher for experimental than control groups.

## ***5.2 Qualitative results***

Results were gathered from the questionnaires, teacher-researcher discussions and written teacher feedback.

### ***5.2.1 Research diary***

The research diary recorded teacher feedback and also researcher perspectives and thoughts as the research unfolded. The diary entries outline and consider the main foci, as in the examples below:

*teacher happy with topic, coincides with personal interests*

*teacher feels that, even at level 4, students find writing very difficult*

*he will try to do 2 lessons together now – he thinks they are too spaced out, and it would have worked better as an intensive*

*teacher feels lesson 1 worked best because it was ‘more communicative’*

### ***5.2.2 Teacher feedback***

The feedback during the course resulted in some adjustments, as described above. Some teacher recommendations concerned the design of activities, including allowing more

time for exercises (although planned to fit into one hour of a two-hour class, lessons often took longer) or clarifying the organisational and topical links between lessons. After teaching the opening activity for lesson 3, for example, the teacher commented that 'this, I realised belatedly, needs to be done in the same class, or immediately after lesson 2'. The aim was always to respect and utilize the feedback, but to retain the overall feel and design of the lessons, and indeed, from lesson 4 onward less written feedback generated fewer changes.

The interview toward the end of the research provided additional detailed feedback, and the summary and quotes below are from this discussion. Aspects of the course which were evaluated positively mainly concerned the overall view of language presented in the materials, rather than the methodology itself, although there were sections such as Lesson 10 (nominalisation) and lesson 9 (Marked Themes) which the teacher identified as especially useful, and generally absent from course books: 'Looking at language from a functional perspective is interesting ... I see writing as communication'; the presentation of this skill, therefore, 'in ways which aid communication' was seen as 'a fairly refreshing way of approaching writing.'

Overall, the teacher judged the emphasis on writing skills as constructive. He expressed concern about insufficient writing practice in course books and a general lack of understanding that writing is a form of communication: 'the general approach is, here is a model, copy it, and you'll be OK. The focus is towards Cambridge exams because we don't view writing as communication'. He commented that 'linkers and connectors' are often presented in class as 'add-ons; we encourage students to see them as extra features that don't give functional meaning to texts.' (*Connectors* were among those features most mentioned in reply to question 2 of the questionnaire). The detailed exploration of texts

was considered useful and necessary, especially for more advanced students: ‘**noticing** is important for CAE groups - I should do more readings in class, but we should de-construct the text and re-construct.’ He also suggested that students should be encouraged to ‘look at the writer’s purpose: how has the writer done this?’

Lesson 4 *Themes and Rhemes* part 2 (reproduced in chapter 3) was singled out as being ‘very different from normal course book materials, so worthwhile ... it opened their eyes to a text being more than just a bunch of words on a page.’ The teacher suggested that the concepts of Theme and Rheme presented here were useful, and that this approach to understanding the organisation of meaning within a sentence was valuable because it is distinct from that usually adopted: ‘they (*the students*) are used to thinking in purely grammatical terms, so the whole idea of ‘sense groups’ is interesting’.

Some of the teacher’s more general criticisms were that the course was ‘highly dependent on reading’ and needed to be ‘more communicative’. Negative feedback focused on content as well as methodology: the topic was seen as interesting from a teacher perspective, but repetitive when used in a series of lessons and over an extended period of time.

The teacher viewed the Darwin exhibition texts as having a ‘fairly well-defined public audience: museum-goers, and a functional purpose: to educate ... they are a bit like a natural science course book’, and suggested that some students failed to engage with the topic. He noted different responses among the groups: level 3 took the course more seriously than CAE, who ‘were not terribly interested in linguistics; they see language as a utilitarian thing.’ The teacher felt that the level of language analysis demanded was uninteresting for the CAE students.

Metalanguage was the area which, either directly or indirectly, the teacher seemed to focus most upon. He saw it as detracting attention from the target language, asserting that 'there would need to be a way of rewriting the materials, eschewing SFL terminology, but still doing the same thing'. He felt that the material was overly theoretical, with expressions such as *textual coherence* being meaningless for students, and as a result, chapters 3 and 4 were simplified. Although he had some theoretical experience of SFL from a Master's course, he found Lesson 7 (*Theme Type*) for example, difficult to teach. The section on Thematic progression was evaluated as using 'too much jargon,' (language such as *Constant Theme*, *Linear Theme* and *Split Rheme*, for example), and he suggested replacing 'Theme' and 'Rheme' with 'subject' and 'object'. Overall, he judged the materials as 'worthwhile', but requiring adaption: 'the target language needs to be right, without having to learn metalanguage'.

While admitting feeling 'a bit shaky' regarding his own knowledge, the teacher suggested that 'a grounding in SFL' was necessary to teach the materials confidently, and that perhaps they would work more effectively as part of an EFL teacher training course. In line with the idea of accessibility, the style of writing was also discussed, and contrasted with the more informal tone of many course books: 'the materials are largely written impersonally – very impersonal – the language needs to be more informal, to make it more personal'. This was not a criticism shared by the students, however, with the only negative feedback expressed in the questionnaires coming from one student (L4) who disliked the Darwin texts, and one (L3) who preferred the course book. A concern with prescriptivism, often found in the literature (see chapter 2), was not raised by teacher or students here.

### 5.2.3 Questionnaires

27 questionnaires were returned: 12 L3, 14 L4 and 1 CAE. Due to end-of-term timetabling complications, the CAE questionnaires were not administered *in situ*, which affected the response rate. The feedback is summarized below: the information is grouped by question, and the main issues isolated, with some direct quotes included. No questions remained unanswered. The comments are also related more systematically to the results and to the classroom materials, in chapter 6.

The colour coding system is maintained here (black: level 3, red: level 4, green: CAE) and in the last two chapters.

#### 1. How do you feel about writing in English now?

21 students (10 L3, 10 L4 and 1 CAE) said they felt better about writing now. 5 of these mentioned specifically an increased self-confidence.

*I feel nice because I can do a writing with some meaning*

*I feel a little more sure and I can explain more things*

*I feel more confident and it's easier for me to express what I want to say*

#### 2. In what way have the classroom materials helped you with your writing?

22 students (9 L3, 12 L4 and 1 CAE) said the materials had helped them in some way.

Those areas most mentioned were *vocabulary* (7 students), *connectors* (6) and *structure*

or *text organization* (5). This reaction is positive, with 75% of level 3 and 85% of level 4 students feeling that their writing skills had benefitted:

*I have learned how to organize ideas in a correct way and how to link them and structure them inside a text.*

*It helped me with new vocabulary and expressions and found them easier. It also helped me to organise better my compositions*

*Classroom materials are more useful for learn English. The most useful have been learning or readings because I have tried to learn what's the structure of more phrases and expressions*

**3. What did you find were the main differences between the materials and the coursebook exercises you usually use for developing your writing? Were these differences good or bad?**

14 students (8 L3, 5 L4 and 1 CAE) identified positive differences, the most common being the distinct nature of the topic. 5 students (1 L3, 4 L4) identified negative differences: 3 of these found the materials more difficult. 66% of lower level students saw the differences as positive, a feeling echoed by the CAE student. Oral feedback from the teacher confirmed this: he suggested that overall level 3 responded most enthusiastically to the materials.

*I think that the materials have been better to improve our writing*

*More materials, read more texts and read about more topics, different from the book ones*



*I did find some differences between the coursebook and the materials. The exercises in the coursebook were all the typical English exercise and the materials of Darwin weren't.*

*The differences between the materials and the coursebook are good because we have more opportunities for writing*

*The main differences are topics (I like Darwin very much) and texts are longer and more complex than in coursebook. In my opinion these differences are good*

*The main difference is the theme. We spoke about different things like Darwin that we didn't speak before in English classes*

#### **4. What areas of writing has the course helped you to understand?**

*Structure, connectors and vocabulary were highlighted by level 3 students. Level 4 mentioned grammar, structure and choice of Theme. The CAE student referred to organisation, linking and structure.*

*I have learned how to organize ideas in a correct way and how to link them and structure them inside a text*

*The introduction, the ways to build paragraphs*

*The structure of a text*

#### **5. Were there any units which you especially liked or disliked?**

Few students identified specific lessons. Those who did (L3) liked the lessons dealing with connectors and the last two, which explored composition writing. These two lessons were



also seen by the teacher as especially relevant. The CAE student highlighted nominalization, again in agreement with the teacher.

*I really like Darwin units and I would like to read more about other important people*

*I think all are good, students need refresh vocabulary and in the lessons we did it*

*When we talked about Darwin's life, because I really love the Biology*

## **6. Do you have any other comments?**

*I think the Darwin history is very original. However, sometimes it was a little difficult for me understand the text*

*It's good that all the units were about the same topic*

*I love your pictures*

The qualitative results above were referred to and considered repeatedly during the interpretation of the quantitative results. In some cases this generated a more informed understanding of the text analyses, while in others it raised more questions, suggesting areas for future exploration. Both types of data are brought together in the final chapters.

## Chapter 6: discussion

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A comparison of the patterns and changes found here with those described in the literature contributes to the interpretation of results. Qualitative feedback is interwoven where possible with quantitative results. Findings across categories show different levels of change from pre- to post-test, some of which may have occurred without the teaching input, as part of the language learning process, while others can be more clearly and confidently related to the materials. In some cases, the qualitative feedback highlights ways in which the students feel their learning has benefitted from the teaching-learning cycle, and connections with the theoretical and pedagogical concepts underlying the study can be drawn, although not always proved.

The most significant findings for Theme type are those relating to Interpersonal and Marked Theme, especially Thematized Comment. The link between Textual Theme and cross-referential progression is also interesting, partly because unpredicted and partly because of the association it establishes between the two areas of exploration, Theme type and progression.

## 6.1 Theme Type

### 6.1.1 Interpersonal Themes

This category (not part of the initial study) was included here as a feature of discursive writing often difficult for non-native speakers. The aim was to increase awareness and understanding of this Theme type and to introduce the idea of a frame of reference for reader and writer: ‘by means of the grammar of the interpersonal metafunction, speakers or writers align themselves with particular perspectives and values’ (Coffin et al., 2009:377). This is Halliday’s ‘subjective orientation of modality’ (Jones, 2005:46).

Nonetheless, interpersonal features were not mentioned in student or teacher feedback, suggesting that they were judged less important. This may reflect expectations and course book emphases, as areas such as perspective and positioning are often considered simply another part of ‘grammar’, albeit a complex one wherein meanings are distributed across texts (cf Butt et al., 2001). McCabe (1999:226) comments that ‘there are not many analyses which specifically report on interpersonal elements in the Themes of the clauses’. Native speakers are usually unaware of how interpersonal grammar operates, making it ‘one of the most difficult areas of English to teach others’ (ibid.); classroom presentation is often decontextualised, focussing on word class rather than use (ibid.) and adopting a structural rather than functional perspective.

The classroom materials here aim to ‘connect form and function’ (Coffin et al., 2009:39), and post-test results indicate a familiarity with the different choices available. Hyland stresses that students need to understand and use these choices confidently, in order to evaluate both argument and audiences, and that these interpersonal features should be prioritised, ‘rather than waiting until students have mastered other aspects of

communication, such as “grammar” (in Johns et al., 2006:238). This means scaffolding learners toward potential levels of performance, using pedagogical materials highlighting this language area, and providing appropriate support for students’ current and potential level (Vygotsky’s ZPD). The discussion of Vygotsy’s ideas in the literature review established the idea that methodology defines and determines teacher role. Nonetheless, the input sometimes seemed to capture more successfully the ZPD for higher-level students. Extracts from student and teacher notes for Lesson 8, dealing with this Theme type, are in Appendix 14.

Butt et al. (2001) describe how the interpersonal Theme *I think* projects opinion in student writing, and this pattern was replicated here, where the Interpersonal Grammatical Metaphors *I think* (80 instances) and *in my opinion* (28) were the most common Interpersonal Themes, across the texts. Results also indicate a much greater reliance on these items at level 3 than at CAE. Myers (2001) explores the expression of personal views in student essays, discussing the relationship between *in my opinion* and writer, reader and topic. He identifies two main areas of difficulty for students: the various functions of opinion expressions within a text, and different constraints in different genres. He does not mention modality, though, an option for native speakers, but especially challenging for L2 students. Hyland (2002a) comments that non-native interpersonal features may differ from those expected by native speakers, thus creating communication barriers.

Modality connects with certainty, but also with politeness and hedging. Jones (2005:46) states that ‘some scholars see hedging as a modal form conferring degrees of certainty on a proposition’. Myers (2001:64) comments that expressions of opinion ‘have an uneasy place in academic discourse’. He sees students’ use of ‘in my opinion’ as orientating

readers' response, rather than conveying writer authority (cf Hewings and Hewings, 2001) and suggests also that 'students usually haven't developed a sense of how one makes serious arguments on what may seem to them to be trivial topics. The 'in my opinion' marks where they step into this still-uncomfortable role' (ibid.:68). The writer position may, however, be uncomfortable and difficult to manage for other reasons: the topic might be one that students more usually discuss informally, or the genre-type may be unfamiliar. Students may also feel a tension between the acknowledgment of others' positioning and the need to create their own 'voice' within the text: Myers (ibid.:77) highlights Bartholmae's (1984) suggestion that in student essays 'what was needed was not just a facility at stating one's views, but a sense that one was entering an ongoing discussion, in which people had said things before that needed to be taken into account'.

'To say 'I think' is a hedge, weakening one's claim by presenting it as personal rather than objective' (Myers, ibid.:76). Shaw and Liu (1998:235) also distinguish between 'I think' as a hedge and 'I think' as an attitude marker. Evaluating L2 writers before and after EAP courses, using a similar experimental design to the present study, they found a decrease in 'I think' and an increase in Thematised Comment, although they don't use the term. The relevance of this distinction is unclear, however, as hedging and politeness are concepts not necessarily apparent to students. Likewise, Myers (ibid.:73) suggests that in 'sentence initial position' 'in my opinion' asserts more claim over what follows. It is, though, almost always in this position here, and such distinctions were probably not understood by the students; Paltridge (2004) discusses the difficulty of explaining textual aspects such as writer purpose and audience to lower level students.

Different choices are available for expressing interpersonal meanings (cf McCabe, 1999), and it is beyond the scope of this study to describe them all, or to undertake detailed

contrastive analyses. McCabe (ibid.) cites research suggesting that Spanish texts may be more formal and impersonal than English texts. Nonetheless,

all modal expressions are less categorical than a plain declarative. For this reason modality is said to express a **relation** to reality, whereas an unmodalised declarative treats the process **as** reality.

(Downing and Locke, 2002:379)

The present study, because of its focus on Theme, does not look specifically at modalised clauses, treating them rather as Interpersonal Themes; Gibbons and Marwick-Smith (1992), however, found considerable improvement in learner control of modality after a teaching learning cycle, raising the question as to whether fewer Interpersonal Themes here might reflect a corresponding increase in modalisation. A small text sample, however, (3 CAE experimental pre-test texts and 3 post-test, by the same students) did not indicate a concomitant rise in modality, either Thematically or Rhematically. A 6.6 average per pre-test text for modalised clauses compared with a 4 post-test.

Interpersonal Theme changes are more apparent and more systematic across all groups than changes elsewhere, and if unrelated to other Thematic type choices, may be linked rather to Thematic progression. Alternatively, these changes might be occurring in isolation; it is, however, a premise of SFL that language choices within a text link more or less overtly to those around them, and all the data collected here point to an interrelatedness of ideas and language features. Change is also noticeable in the CAE experimental group in cross-referential progression, raising the possibility of a connection with the disappearance of Interpersonal Themes. This type of interruption, in a pre-test script, is not seen post-test:

they want a continuous evaluation (coursework assessment, homework, etc.). In my opinion, the continuous evaluation is the best method (CAE ex pre)

Examples below show Thematic links advancing the argument in a way possibly antipathetic to, because potentially interrupted by, an Interpersonal Theme:

you can attend courses on-line to complete your curriculum. This allows students to study at their own pace and it doesn't require travelling if you don't live nearby (CAE ex post)

It is important to bear in mind that this useful and unlimited tool has also its drawbacks. One particular weakness of the internet is the difficulty of controlling the truthfulness of the information offered (CAE ex post)

Questionnaire feedback, citing structure and text development as main areas of student focus, might therefore explain the decrease in interpersonal elements: *I have learned how to organize ideas in a correct way and how to link them and structure them inside a text.*

Results may also indicate a movement from the personal to impersonal voice as described by authors such Knapp and Watkins (2005:188): their 'modalised statements' (e.g. 'it is essential to') are related to Thompson's Thematized Comment. Shaw and Liu (1998:242) found 'a substantial shift from personal to impersonal forms of expression', meaning an increase in Thematized comment, and offer more explicit writer intervention as a possible reason. (The writer-reader relationship is discussed below). A direct connection is not evident here, however, as Thematized Comment was used very slightly less post-test in both CAE groups and level 3 experimental, and much less (1.07 to 0.4 average per text) at level 3 control. The classroom input may have developed awareness of other strategies, such as the incorporation of Interpersonal Themes into Topical Themes. Figure 6.1., below, illustrates examples of this: the choice of Theme is used to convey the writer's point of view, and to influence and direct the reader's response. This positioning is

achieved through Themes which combine the Topical and Interpersonal. The 3 parallel texts cited above show some important changes here: the post-test scripts contain **15** of this Theme-type, compared with **3** pre-test, where the interpersonal element is conveyed in **9** separate Interpersonal Themes and Thematised comments. The Interpersonal element is therefore being assimilated into the Topical Theme.

This moves the analysis into the area of Appraisal (or 'evaluation') (Thompson, 2004:75) related to modality but involving distinct choices, and 'on the edge of grammar: much of appraisal is expressed by lexical choices' (ibid.). For Thompson, appraisal analysis is 'illuminating' (ibid.:77) but complex. Butt et al. (2001) define it as the positioning of audience by the 'choice of lexicogrammatical patterns' in a text:

effective speakers and writers are able to spread appraisal meanings across a whole text so that the audience is drawn to a particular point of view or interpretation of the content which seems natural.

(Butt et al., 2001:121)

This appraisal distribution is apparent in figure 6.1, below:



**It is undoubtedly the case** *that* **we** live in an age **when** new technologies such as the internet are becoming more and more present in our daily lives. **The internet** is, without any doubt, a major source of information. *However,* **whether or not this information is useful for university studies** is an open debate.

**One of the main advantages of using the internet for university studies** is *that* **it** is a valuable source of information **that** can be consulted at any time or place without the need of having to carry out heavy books or spending your precious time at the library. *Furthermore,* **it** provides access to all kind of information from all over the world. **Just with some movements of your fingers,** not only can we perform extensive searches *but* **we** are also allowed to share and comment our information with others.

**It is important to bear in mind** *that* **this useful and unlimited tool** has also its drawbacks. **One particular weakness of the internet** is the difficulty of controlling the truthfulness of the information offered. **Never** should you trust anything without contrasting it carefully and thoroughly. *Otherwise,* **you** could commit huge mistakes **which** may represent having bad results in yours studies. **Equally problematic** is the fact of how easy is to become distracted while using the internet, ending the day without having done nothing of profit for your studies.

*In conclusion,* **when used properly** the internet can be an excellent source of information **which** may be highly useful for our studies. *Nevertheless,* **special attention** should be paid with regard to the reliance in the material obtained. **(CAE ex post)**

**Figure 6.1** Appraisal

Evaluation is woven into the whole text, through a variety of Theme choice and vocabulary. Appraisal here is expressed through 'Appreciation' and 'Affect' (Thompson, 2004:76), and is not mainly dependent on specific structural features. One exception cited by Thompson, however, is the anticipatory 'it' structure (**it is undoubtedly the case, it is important to bear in mind**, from this example). Here, 'the introductory clause has the function of evaluating the information in the following clause' (ibid.:78).

'Arguing is about interpreting the world and persuading an audience of the validity of this interpretation' (Knapp and Watkins, 2005:196). Coherence in argument is achieved

through control of all Theme types, but it is the Interpersonal Themes which most contribute to the establishment of objectivity and positioning and to the construction of a reader-writer relationship which allows the argument to develop.

### 6.1.2 Textual Themes

The number of Textual Themes remained relatively constant, except for the CAE experimental group, where they decreased. It may be that higher-level students begin to employ other resources for textual organization, and that the classroom input stimulated this process. The emphasis throughout the materials is on the range of choices available to writers, and in encouraging experimentation with different language options:

*Textual Themes are the 'linkers' which are often taught in coursebooks as ways of structuring texts, especially perhaps with discursive compositions. These types of words or expressions can be Thematic if they are used at the beginning of a clause to signpost the discussion. They are a part of textual organization, but you need to be careful not to overuse them; all of the aspects of texts that we have looked at in previous lessons are equally as important in writing successful texts..*

Introduction to lesson 8 (p.29)

(see Appendix 15 for student and teacher materials for Textual Themes)

If these other resources are being utilized, then associations with an increase in cross-referential Themes and with alternative Thematic choices are plausible. One cohesive device possibly being used instead of or alongside Textual Themes is Marked Theme.

Textual Theme choice varied little, both among groups and from pre- to post-test. The exceptions, though, and as such the most interesting to highlight, were *because* and *that*. An increase in *that* and a decrease in *because* in all groups except level 3 control were the main changes with this Theme type. Level 3 scores were noteworthy because outside the

overall pattern: the use of *that* may be a later language development, accelerated in level 3 experimental, where it is employed mainly in expansion (cf Bloor and Bloor, 2004) and projection, anticipating cross-referential progression results. At CAE level the constructions preceding *that* in projected or dependent clauses are more complex:

### L3 ex post

Another **advantage** is *that you* can send your works (**expansion**)

I **think** *that the Internet* is useful for my university studies (**projection**)

Another **disadvantage** is *that students* write less (**example**)

### CAE ex post

All of this leads me **to conclude** *that Internet* (**projection**)

One of the **main advantages** of using the **Internet for university studies** is *that it* is a valuable (**expansion, example**)

There can be no doubt *that new technologies* have arrived (**projection**)

*Because* was used much less post-test, and not at all by CAE Experimental, despite being the most common pre-test Textual Theme for this group. Examples below show where an **alternative construction** was preferred to *because*. Although the materials did not deal with this overtly, the systematic and detailed exposure to texts perhaps facilitated more options of the type available to native speakers when they write.

**Equally problematic** is the fact of how easy is to become distracted while using the internet, **ending the day** without having done nothing of profit for your studies (**CAE ex, post**)

**This accessibility** is a great benefit **as you** can access to the studying material at anytime from anywhere with internet connection (**CAE ex, post**)



Shaw and Liu (1998:233) also found a reduction in the use of *because*. They relate this to an increase in (more concise) non-clausal expressions of cause and a decline in 'knowledge-base use', where *because* indicates the general understanding underlying the preceding claim, rather than the cause. This use is sometimes recognised as a feature of spoken rather than written English:

**There are** a lot of websites with recent information *because in the internet* the news are renovated every day. **(L3 cont post) (subordinate clause of cause)**

**You** can use internet to search information, *(missing Theme – it)* is quick *but sometimes* it's dangerous *because the information* is not true **(L3 cont post) (knowledge-base)**

Shaw and Liu's reasoning may be relevant here; the analysis is less detailed than theirs, but certainly the post-test scripts illustrate other causal expressions. CAE experimental, for example, has *not only ... but, otherwise, and as*.

### 6.1.3 Marked Themes

Marked theme represents a foregrounding of the speaker's point of departure, and its meaning appears from its tendency of association with a particular information structure.

(Halliday, 1967:214)

Marked Themes examined here are mainly adverbial groups and prepositional phrases functioning as Circumstantial Adjuncts, and these contribute to the experiential meaning (cf Bloor and Bloor, 2004, Thompson, 2004). Dependent clauses in Thematic position, providing circumstantial information, and Thematised Comment are also included. For

Marked Themes, results indicate an increase for CAE experimental, stability for level 3 experimental, and a decrease for level 3 control. The use of non-finite clauses as a percentage of these Marked Themes increased for both experimental groups. These results suggest that Marked Theme options may be more accessible at higher levels (cf Textual Themes, above) and also that lesson 9, dealing with Marked Theme in sections on *Clauses as Theme* and *Circumstantial Themes*, has had some effect (see Appendix 16).

Results described above for Thematised Comment (mainly decreasing) and Circumstantial Themes (almost doubling at CAE level) were noteworthy as representing changes linking directly to topics from lessons 8 and 9. There is little to compare this with in the literature, although in a study making unusually explicit reference to Thematic patterning, Martínez Lirola (2006) explores Marked Themes and progression patterns within texts. 'Difficulties with theme and rheme and information structure' (ibid.:143) are identified, although the analysis is too general to provide clear comparisons.

The decrease in dependent clauses as Marked Theme for all groups and the increased use of non-finite clauses as Marked Theme for the experimental groups (especially level 3) were other notable changes. Butt et al. (2001:127) suggest that the Finite links verb and subject, rendering the proposition debateable, and is therefore useful for EAP students: 'putting meanings into NON-FINITE clauses is a way of making meanings unavailable for argument or discussion'. Results may reflect the increased confidence expressed in questionnaires: *I feel more confident and it's easier for me to express what I want to say*. Halliday (1967:219) comments that 'marked is not to be equated with rare': understanding that this Theme type is found across genres is an important part of language learning.

Dependent clauses within cross-referential progression (see below) are another Marked Theme choice. Always in combination with a main clause, their successful linking automatically contributes to textual development.

**Learning through internet** has increase the availability of educational resources and studying oportunities **(CAE ex post)**

**Using the internet for studies** is a **very powerful tool** **(CAE ex post)**

#### **Questionnaire feedback**

*I feel more confident and it's easier for me to express what I want to say*

*I feel a little more sure and I can explain more things*

## **6.2 Thematic progression**

### **6.2.1 Cross-Referential**

McCabe (1999:170) suggests that cross-referential progression or 'simple linear progression', is the 'most elementary, or basic, thematic progression.' Results showed an increase in the number of post-test cross-referential Themes for both experimental and control groups, but especially in the case of CAE experimental. Unsuccessful attempts were ultimately included as exhibiting awareness of this progression-type and a willingness to experiment with it. The Thematic progression input may have encouraged risk-taking, but there is nothing in the literature to substantiate or refute this idea, and additional qualitative information on motivation and attitude would be necessary to explore this proposition. Nonetheless, the overall increase in confidence described in the qualitative feedback, combined with alternative strategies for understanding and organising texts may have generated an appropriate context for risk-taking:



*I feel that it isn't very difficult, you only have to practice and have enough vocabulary*

*I'm better at writing*

*compositions are easier*

Mercer (2004:2) discusses how knowledge and understanding are developed, and comments that 'the failures are as important for our understanding of the processes as the successes.' Hyland (2002b) expresses a similar idea:

while fewer errors might be seen as an index of progress, this is equally likely to indicate the writer's reluctance to take risks and reach beyond a current level of competence.

(Hyland, 2002b)

This approach to learning and teaching is embedded within the experimental stage here, both through the exploration of ideas and aspects of language use which are mainly unfamiliar and sometimes complex, and also through the incorporation of the pre-test compositions into the lessons. Lesson 6, for example, asks the students to consider the effectiveness of their own language choices rather than those of an 'expert'. The aim is to use errors constructively and encourage awareness of individual progress:

Look back at lesson 4, to revise the way a sentence can be divided into Themes and Rhemes.

a) In pairs, look at the essay you wrote at the beginning of the course, and try to identify some of the Themes you have used. Do these Themes signpost the reader effectively? Do they reach a logical conclusion in the final paragraph?

(p.19)

As with Marked and Textual Themes, classroom input for cross-referential progression therefore impacted more at a higher level than intermediate. Results show almost a mirror effect with constant Theme progression results where there was an overall decline, except for level 3 control. If the tendency is for more complex structures (here, cross-referential progression) to increase anyway with learning, in line with Krashen's (1981) natural order hypothesis, the materials perhaps simply accelerated the process. (Krashen's hypothesis suggests that language acquisition follows a predictable order, with certain structures acquired earlier than others, whatever the L1. The order of acquisition for EFL is similar, although not identical, to the order for L1 English). And if indeed cross-referential progression shows more developed systems of organisation (Er, 2001), the qualitative information is consistent with these findings:

*I think that I have improved my writing structure*

*It helped me with new vocabulary and expressions and found them easier. It also helped me to organise better my compositions*

Cross-referential progression is often found in academic texts and can be challenging for students (Er, *ibid.*), so findings here are encouraging. Fries asserts that

academic texts ... correlate with thematic progression which shows a high incidence of cross-referential links from the Rheme of one sentence to the Theme of the next.

Fries (cited in Er, 2001:232)

Er found few instances of cross-referential progression in her analysis of a non-native text, and states that lack of confidence in handling such Thematic progression



'contributes significantly to the sense that the text is lacking in the development of ideas' (ibid).

Weissberg (1984) discusses paragraphs from published scientific research, used in an ESL class:

in those paragraphs where patterning did occur, the linear pattern (*ie cross-referential*) was found to be the most common, being especially frequent in introduction and discussion paragraphs. The constant topic pattern occurred least frequently.

Weissberg (1984:493)

For some authors, the reader-writer relationship is embedded in Thematic choice here. McCabe (1999) found more instances of cross-referential than constant Theme progression in both her corpora (Spanish and English texts), attributing this to the pedagogical nature of the texts and to 'the asymmetrical relationship between the writer and the reader' (1999:203). She states (ibid.:190) that both Nwogu and Weissberg found simple linear thematic progression patterns dominating in texts involving explanation and exposition. Nwogu (cited in McCabe, 1999) also mentions the writer-audience relationship, asserting that where shared knowledge is unequal, information must be selected from that given Rhematically. For McCabe (1999:190), the cross-referential pattern helps readers understand the writer's points of departure, so they can 'optimally build up the conceptual framework'. Montaña Harman (1991) compares Spanish and English L1 student texts using SFL analytical procedures. She highlights language differences concerning cohesion which might make expository writing complex for students:

the development of the paragraph in the Romance languages exhibits a much greater freedom to introduce extraneous material in complex digressions from the central idea.

(Montaño Harman, 1991:418)

The implications for Thematic organisation might be a topic for future research, although Montaño Harman does not elaborate on how the appropriate discourse features might be taught.

Cross-referential progression is mainly analysed in the literature within the context of scientific or technical writing (Moore, 2006) or history (McCabe, 1999), or with L2 texts (Er, 2001). Topical Themes in these examples tend to be simple rather than multiple, and the L1 writing often involves nominalisations, more infrequent in L2 writing, so there is little direct comparison with the student texts here. Butt et al. (2001:149) suggest that the identification of Thematic progression can 'ensure that topical Themes progress in an orderly, and even predictable, way – either by repeating the Theme or thematic pattern over several clauses or by incorporating the Rheme from one clause into the Theme of the next'.

Examples below illustrate successful management of cross-referential progression. Analysis suggests that expansion and elaboration represent the main language features used: an idea introduced Rhematically is expanded or elaborated, or an example provided, in a movement from the general to the more specific. This finding reflects input from lessons 3, 5, 6 and 7 especially (Appendix 17). The research design thus allows for a connection between the pedagogical input and greater confidence with this cohesive feature.

First of all, the creation of the Internet network has been a great advantage for university studies overall. Nowadays, Internet seems to be an incredible communication channel between people, so between students and professors of the university. The students can ask their doubts and curiosities only by sending an e-mail to the professor and he only has to reply (UNSUCCESSFUL) it with few clicks. In that sense, communication is faster than before.

However, although communication is faster, the relationship between the student and the professor is more impersonal and less close. This is a big disadvantage because the professor has no chance of getting to know their pupils. (CAE cont, post)

On the other hand, there are disadvantageous facts for the use of the net to studying English. One of them is that, nowadays, we are spending lots of hours in front of any screen (TV, PC, ...) and, from my point of view, this fact could bring us health problems; the printed information is useful to decrease the stress level. In addition, having access to the Internet has also high cost that is not possible for a high number of persons. (CAE cont, post)

### 6.2.2 Constant

Just as cross-referential Themes for experimental and control groups increased post-test, so the use of constant Theme declined for all groups except level 3 control.

It may be that the constant progression pattern is more straightforward and so appears less anyway at higher levels (i.e. the reverse of cross-referential); as the only increase was at level 3 control, perhaps the developmental process was precipitated for level 3 experimental. Martínez Lirola (2006), and Lee (2002) relate textual coherence to Thematic patterning, but no research specifically comparing the impact of SFL input on Theme choice and progression type is available.

There are connections here also with interpersonal meanings, especially in the writer-reader relationship discussed above. McCabe (1999) describes Nwogu's findings:

Authors in a symmetrical relationship with their readers are more likely to draw on the stock of shared knowledge as the point of departure of their clauses. If this element remains constant over a series of clauses, the result is the constant Theme pattern.

(McCabe, 1999:190)

McCabe highlights one of the advantages of this progression type: familiarity with Thematic content may facilitate reading comprehension, because more attention can be devoted to information in the rheme. The constant Theme pattern is conceivably easier for students to manage initially, both when reading and writing, but it is a feature of textual organisation which they may not have consciously focussed upon in class. *The situation when you have to choose one theme, and when not* was chosen by one student as the area of writing most clarified by the course. Martínez Lirola (2006:144) cites 'difficulties with theme and rheme and information structure' as one of eleven main errors on student texts and explains how she focuses on sentence organisation and information distribution to help students understand these concepts.

The methodology might inadvertently have contributed to changes, by establishing different writer-reader relationships. The pre-test essay title perhaps assumes more knowledge on the part of the reader (the teacher) regarding course assessment. Although the students would also have knowledge, from a different perspective, they are likely to view the topic as debateable but ultimately within teacher control. The post-test title supposes a more asymmetrical relationship in terms of knowledge, as the students have more experience of internet use for university studies and also a level of personal control which they lack with assessment.

## Essay titles

**Pre-test:** *What is the best method of assessment for students: a final exam, coursework assessment, or a mixture of both?*

**Post-test:** *What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet for your university studies?*

Establishing the presence and development of constant Theme chains was sometimes complex. The language involved in the chains was often repetitive, and very long chains are almost always simple Themes, and usually pronouns: (Thematic chains are in dark blue)

*On the other hand there are also disadvantages. We said that we can find a lot of information and this can be a problem too, if we don't know how to select the good one. Also we must be conscient that not all the information is truth. We can have more facility to copy works of words of other people (L3 cont post)*

The examples below are more successful. Here, the chain develops through the context

*Nowadays, the methods of assessment in the University are changing. A few years ago, the assessment method consisted in a final exam, and today in most of the cases you have to present some kind of written work (CAE cont pre)*

and here, short chains work in combination:

*On the other hand, there is the opposite kind of assessment where the student is being evaluated during the whole course. The teacher gives him different projects that he ought to do at the same time the teacher is explaining the topic at class. With this type of evaluation, there is a big weakness alike. In this case, (UNSUCCESSFUL) the pupil is working during the whole course, so he has less freedom. Moreover, in this sort of assessment, it would be a great deal work or do other activities at the same time. (CAE cont pre)*



Below, the repeated Theme is identified through different language items, such as a noun and pronoun or a referent

**Students** may think *that it is easy* to study with the notes that are on the internet *and they* decide not to go to class (L3 ex post)

*In my opinion*, a mixture of coursework assessment and final exam is the best and the most representative way to evaluate the students. **This method** is useful (CAE ex pre)

or nouns with shared intended meaning:

*and pupils* have to learn to choose the correct one and the most useful. **Another disadvantage** is *that students* are forgotten what is a library (L3 ex post)

Despite these examples, though, most constant Theme chains are simple repetition, although the focus sometimes changes:

**The first advantage we see** is *that you* can look for any kind of information at anytime and anywhere. **This information** arrives you very quickly *and you* don't lose time looking for it, **this** is the second advantage. **You** can also look for examples, virtually library's, etc. **It is useful** also for doing work with you group study. **You** can share and compare information and opinions virtually.

*On the other hand there are* also disadvantages. **We** said *that we* can find a lot of information *and this* can be a problem too, *if we* don't know how to select the good one. **Also we** must be conscient *that not all the information* is truth. **We** can have more facility to copy works of words of other people. **This aspect** is very control by the University. (L3 cont post)

With simple repetition, the contribution to coherence is less effective, and can signal 'a text which is going nowhere' (Er, 2001:324). McGee (2009:214) discusses why students rely so heavily on repetition: he makes the same link between reading material and student writing which partly triggered this research ('edited and simplified texts are not

rich in their lexical cohesive ties'). An overuse of repeated Themes may give a 'spoken' feel to a written text and, if Themes are unpredictable, present a series of disconnected ideas rather than a cohesive argument (Er, 2001).

Overall, there are few examples of non-repetitive chains, indicating that the materials need to clarify more the successful management of this Theme type, perhaps by incorporating examples like the one above and identifying alternative Theme choices. Analysis of Theme type or Thematic progression from student texts might thus be used within the classroom to demonstrate how a smooth control of Thematic progression can have a positive effect on the reader, while a misunderstanding of reader expectation through the wrong Theme choice or a break in a Thematic chain can have the opposite effect:

ideas are made easier for readers to follow, in some genres at least, when thematic choices are not unexpected but are related to ideas they have met in the theme or rheme of an earlier clause.

(Hyland, 2002a:11)

This concept of reader expectation and writer awareness of audience in connection with Theme choice is explored by Butt et al. (2001:149), who assert that the reader 'should not be surprised by the choice of Theme'.

The students' own writing (with their permission) might be incorporated into future copies of the materials, and additional materials created focussing more specifically and in more detail on the development of Thematic chains. This may also be an area of writing which takes longer and needs more exposure to well-constructed texts to develop.



### 6.2.3 Cross-Referential and Constant

All groups except level 3 control made greater use of cross-referential progression after the classroom input, so that the *difference* between the two progression types was reduced. Independently of any considerations as to how these progression types are managed, these scores suggest more varied progression patterns in the post-test scripts. Because the CAE control group also showed a more even distribution, general language learning development might be an influencing factor. Again, there is no point of comparison in the literature, as studies are mainly descriptive or based on corpora, or, if experimental, less concerned with specific language features.

### 6.2.4 Derived

Although this Theme type was used less than cross-referential and constant, post-test increases for the experimental groups suggest that lesson 7 may have influenced the writing:

**3. The split Rheme Pattern** (the Rheme of the first clause has different components, which are used in turn as Theme for subsequent clauses)

Darwin's idea was that natural selection needs three things: variation, competition and inheritance.

Variation means that all individuals within a species have different characteristics.

With so many individuals competing against each other, the slight variations give some a better chance of survival.

Over many generations, modifications or adaptations might be seen, which could result in a new species.

(p.25)

Examples of successful use are given in Appendix 18.

### 6.3 Qualitative feedback

Teacher and student feedback showed the materials were considered interesting and worthwhile, although challenging, with textual organization and learning new vocabulary cited as areas which had especially developed. Student responses to question 2 (*In what way have the classroom materials helped you with your writing?*) mention familiar areas of language use (*I pay more attention in the linking expressions, structure*) but also the more unfamiliar, such as *nominalisation*. This feedback ties in with Paltridge's (2004) assertion:

a genre-based approach ... starts with genre as the overall driving force of the syllabus yet still includes all other aspects of language – such as grammar, functions, vocabulary, and language skills – that one might expect to see in a communicative syllabus.

(Paltridge, 2004:4)

Halliday (1967:211) cites as important cohesive patterns *substitution* and *reference*, both familiar devices for students.

Lesson 9 (*Nominalisation*) and Lesson 10 (*Marked Themes*) were highlighted by teacher and students as especially useful. Thompson (2009) discusses the relationship between nominalisation and 'higher-rated dissertations', indicating the relevance of work in this area for student writing and teacher assessment. Hyland (2006:13) includes 'high nominal style' as one of 3 key areas of academic writing, along with specialist vocabulary and

impersonal voice, and many of the authors referred to in this study discuss nominalisation in detail (cf Butt et al., 2001, Paltridge, 2004). The use of nominalisation in thematic position was not explored as a separate category in the study, and would be an area for future research. The feedback on Marked Themes is reflected in the quantitative results discussed above, thus bringing together distinct but intertwined areas of the methodology. Thompson (2004:112) asserts that circumstantial elements represent a complex area which 'has not had the attention it deserves', so responses here are encouraging, especially with regard to lower level students.

A greater awareness of text construction in general was mentioned, echoing results from Lee (2002:135): '(the students) felt that the teaching of coherence had enhanced their awareness of what effective writing should entail'. The self-confidence expressed in responses to question 1 (*How do you feel about writing in English now?*) echoes the increased confidence among students after their academic writing course noted by Storch and Tapper (2009). Perhaps the feeling of developing a more in-depth understanding of how language functions, and acquiring new resources for interpreting and describing meaning (cf Butt et al., 2001) contributed to this result. The teacher also mentioned 'noticing' as an important skill for CAE students. Hyland describes this as an SLA concept related to 'consciousness raising' in his discussion of genre pedagogy (2007:160).

Teacher and student feedback did not always coincide. The CAE student and the majority of lower level students responded positively to differences between the materials and the course book, with one level 3 student evaluating the materials as *original but difficult*. It might be that despite the challenging nature of the content, lower level students were more willing to accept new ideas and activity types. This, though, is inconsistent with teacher feedback from earlier in the course, stating that students were unused to this

kind of analysis, and that the content should be more communicative. The teacher found Darwin as a topic repetitive, but most student responses disagreed: *it's good that all the units were about the same topic.*

Student and teacher expectations, perhaps especially those of the teacher, are very closely bound up with a Communicative methodology, and this is a factor to take into consideration. A key idea emerging throughout the research, especially in conversation with the teacher and through the written feedback, is that of teacher and student perceptions of teaching and learning. The Communicative methodology might sometimes prioritise oral skills at the expense of reading and writing skills, and the teacher feedback in many ways reflects this: the more positive comments centre on the links established between writer purpose and meaning, and the emphasis on written language as communication.

Despite this, some of the teacher's more general criticisms (especially early on in the course) concerned the high amount of reading involved, and a perception that the lessons were not sufficiently communicative. (Lee (2002:153) also reports that some students found the lessons in her research boring because they expected something 'less academic'). The materials design sought to allow for a more individual, reading-based approach, introducing different emphases from those associated with the Communicative methodology, but focussing too on the functional role of language choices. Martinez Lirola (2006:146) states her purpose as being for students to see writing 'as a means of communication', and the teacher's concerns are very much in accordance with this idea. The final interview feedback, although not always positive, did suggest that the teacher had had time to consider carefully the aims and methodology inherent in the materials, and that the emphasis on understanding written texts was judged potentially useful. His

desire to increase the amount of reading in class (despite earlier comments) and to 'deconstruct texts' suggest that the approach was challenging, but had introduced ideas and activities of value within the classroom.

The teacher's concern with metalanguage reflects an aspect of SFL that researchers have had to decide how best to manage. 'This rich metalanguage provides teachers with both a valuable resource and a practical problem' (Butt et al., 2001:251). Weissberg (1984) prefers 'topic' and 'comment' for sentence parts, rather than Theme and Rheme, and refers to 'topic development' rather than Thematic progression. Martínez Lirola (2006:148) 'did not use terms like Theme or Rheme; I referred to them as the beginning and ending of sentences'. The classroom materials were constructed on the premise that the metalanguage is an important tool for exploring language, which, if incorporated successfully, can result in clearer and more explicit descriptions and analyses. Teacher and student feedback here did not coincide: the students did not mention the metalanguage as problematic, or indeed refer to it at all (except for the student who mentioned understanding Theme choice as a positive aspect of writing). Students in Spain are used to dealing with conventional grammatical labels for describing their own and foreign languages at school, so perhaps this aspect of the course was less daunting than the teacher imagined. The teacher himself seemed initially to become more confident with the metalanguage, although this was not reflected in the final interview.

The first lessons were undoubtedly challenging, both for teacher and students, and the unfamiliar nature of the methodology may have initially influenced teaching, and therefore learning, although this is difficult to assess. The relation of teacher feedback to the quantitative findings is complex: cross-referential Themes, for example, are quite late taught within the course, and teacher confidence would have increased by this stage. The

teacher also commented that teaching the course for a second time would be easier because it would be more familiar, and therefore more effective. More time than was available here is probably necessary to become comfortable with the metalanguage. It may be that differences between the materials and standard text books are more apparent (and more disorientating) at the start of the course, and that the metalanguage becomes progressively less threatening or abstruse.

Student responses in general, especially levels 3 and 4, were more positive than teacher response. Nevertheless, end-of-course teacher comments were positive overall, mentioning especially level 3 enthusiasm, although with some caveats, mainly organisational rather than pedagogical. The methodology was judged accessible, but the implementation needed to be fine-tuned. The teacher felt that the course would work better over a shorter time period, as the input was demanding, and links between lessons meant that absenteeism and long intervals between classes created difficulties. Functional grammar books such as Coffin et al. (2009) often constitute courses in themselves, but selecting appropriate features for inclusion within conventional courses necessarily means condensing material, both in terms of content and time. A one-month intensive course, for example, where attendance is more guaranteed and continuity more attainable, might be a viable future option.

The above results are as objective as possible. Storch and Tapper (2009:217) state that their student feedback reflects 'items from the ... syllabus that had been discussed in class and stressed as feedback criteria on assignments', but this was not the case here. No suggestions were made to students or teacher that any particular features should be incorporated within either compositions or feedback.

## 6.4 Conclusions

The research hypothesis was that 'a text-based approach would enable students to produce written texts more consistent with native-speaker texts than does the Communicative Approach'. Results show changes and developments in student writing, but in some categories more than others. Findings in relation to one of the main research questions (*How significant is awareness of thematic structure in creating a coherent text in L1 and L2?*) suggest a range of resources available to students within the idea of 'an awareness of thematic structure'. These are explored here within the different categories, and work together to achieve textual cohesion. The other main research question centred on identifying the implication of a focus on thematic structure for other L2 teaching methods. Results show that, although the materials can be incorporated into more traditional courses, an alternative method of organization might be preferable.

Cohen et al. (2006:230) discuss the issues of 'ownership' and 'involvement' for teachers and research. Teacher participation (and, by implication, the teacher-researcher relationship) was a fundamental part of the present study, and the working relationship developed as the research progressed. The qualitative data shows involvement and commitment to the research, at least in the case of the teacher and those students who completed the questionnaires; Dockrell's (1988) assertion that 'the researcher must not minimize or indeed exaggerate the demands that are to be made in terms of time, effort, or stress on subjects' refers to classroom observation, but is applicable here.

The potential generalisability of the research depends on the success of the operationalisation process, as variables might be operationalised distinctly, and the categories chosen here have no exclusive claim to validity. Even if post-test analyses show texts to be nearer to native-speaker texts in some respects, there may be no direct



relationship between this and, for example, exam success (perhaps a more central concern for some students!) Results need to be of some theoretical or practical significance, ideally involving the application of findings to material development and teaching strategies, making theoretical ideas accessible and relevant to teacher and learner. The presentation of results and the possible research audiences are other factors to consider: to be beneficial to a wider professional audience and to academia the study must be interesting and comprehensible to both. The most immediate aim for dissemination is to provide a copy of the project and materials for use in the EIM.

## Chapter 7: conclusion

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*'We can see the world in a linguistic grain of sand' (Thompson 2004:194).*

To draw conclusions, it is useful to look back and to foreground again those research questions posed at the beginning of the study:

***How significant is awareness of thematic structure in creating a coherent text in L1 and L2?***

***What implication does a focus on thematic structure have for L2 teaching methods highlighting isolated language features?***

It is also appropriate to state again the research hypothesis, which underlies the attempt to answer these questions:

***A text-based approach will enable students to produce written texts more consistent with native speaker texts than does the Communicative Approach.***

Those areas where the results seem to draw together most clearly the theoretical, pedagogical and practical concerns discussed in the opening chapters, comprise a framework for the following discussion. Just as the categories for the analysis emerged from an exploration of the texts, so the sections below evolved from an evaluation of the overall research process and results. Within this context and with reference to the

literature and methodological procedures described above, the most important changes are discussed, together with the implications for future research and teaching. The effectiveness of the methodology and the contribution of the research to answering the research questions are considered, and student feedback (italicised, and maintaining the colour coding) is incorporated throughout.

## 7.1 The Research methodology

*Even though time to practise this exercises has been limited and I cannot measure how useful they have been for improving my writings I should say that I find the fact of searching for new teaching methodologies quite interesting.*

The choice of methodology, and its appropriateness in answering the research questions are central considerations in determining the relevance and reliability of the findings: 'the validity of conclusion based on quantitative data hinges on the extent to which the data actually measure accurately what we are interested in' (The Open University, 2003b:113). The experimental design was partly a response to the scarcity of similar studies, and it did produce data showing changes more or less directly linked to the use of a text-based approach in the classroom. The focus and method of the analysis were revisited as new and sometimes unpredicted situations arose, but the overall structure and outline of the research proposal remained consistent, with some modifications, such as the description of different clause types within the analysis and the exclusion of the level 4 scripts in the absence of a control group. Some of these were practical, procedural changes, while others were the result of a methodology which aimed to be descriptive rather than

prescriptive, and so partly developed in response to the data itself. These adjustments, however, did not impinge on the overall design.

Butt et al. (2001) discuss how an understanding of different Theme types enhances language teaching and learning; the concepts of Theme and Rheme as components of cohesion represented the driving force of the research, and proved useful in the practical application of SFL within an EAP context. The aim of the study was always to explore rather than prove, and analogous research could feasibly have been carried out by constructing materials around other SFL concepts such as experiential grammar or clause complexes, for example. Nonetheless, the choice of Theme and Rheme did allow for a specific area of focus and a starting point within functional grammar, entering through the area of textual meaning but allowing also consideration of a wider range of features, especially within the interpersonal function. Although the text analysis proved more complex than predicted, Theme type and progression were mostly clearly identifiable, and the link between student texts and classroom materials was strong enough for the project to feel sufficiently composite and coherent as a unified piece of work, despite the distinct stages and changes of focus between theoretical text analyses and classroom practice. Within the pre-test – teaching input - post-test sequence, the choice of compositions as instruments for data collection generated appropriate and original data. Given more time, and a wider student and teacher participation, the impact of the classroom materials could be explored in a broader range of contexts (see section 6, below).

With hindsight, and with more time between the materials design and the teaching phase, it might have been beneficial to give the teacher the opportunity to pilot some of the lessons with a group uninvolved in the research. The outcomes were not predictable,

because of the lack of directly comparable studies, but they did illuminate and connect with issues discussed in current research and within language teaching pedagogy, and raise questions for future exploration. Coffin (2003:17) also analyses learner texts, concluding that 'by analysing more and less successful examples of a target genre, teachers establish a useful basis for planning language tasks and programs'.

The qualitative feedback provided a framework for the quantitative data. The questionnaire gathered appropriate and comprehensible data, without superfluous or irrelevant information and all respondents were able to complete it, which had not been the case in the pilot study. A low response rate, however, means that the information obtained may reflect an 'unrepresentative sample of the population' (The Open University, 2003b:175). Reliability and validity presupposes a minimum level of participation: problems arose not with the design of the questionnaire itself, as most respondents provided detailed considerations of the topics, but with the administration. Attendance was low for the final classes, and the questionnaire might have been given slightly earlier. The importance of the questionnaire (and, indeed, the final composition) could have been emphasised more by the researcher from the beginning of the course. The qualitative responses and perhaps also the post-test compositions may have been to some extent self-selecting, if those students attending the final classes were more motivated. Therefore, despite a generally favourable student reaction, there were contextual demands, such as exam pressures or the need to combine work with university studies, which resulted in time constraints and impacted on the data collection process. Butt et al. (2001:277) comment that 'grammatical analysis is also creative and enjoyable'. The final consideration relating to an evaluation of the methodology is: can grammar be

made fun? Was the research valuable and interesting, but also *enjoyable* for the participants? If so, they may be motivated to develop their knowledge further.

*I feel nice because I can do a writing with some meaning*

## 7.2 Within the classroom

*I'm afraid when someone ask me to write a composition in English*

The findings relating to the teaching approach (linking especially to the second research question above) show that the materials can be incorporated successfully into a more traditional course, although an alternative method of organization might be preferable. The systematic inclusion of (and emphasis on) longer and more 'academic' texts, in combination with analyses of how language functions within these texts, demanded a shift in perception for teacher and students: the materials relied upon acceptance of a certain amount of unfamiliar metalanguage and an engagement with the new concepts and methods of understanding which this language describes.

This area was one in which the teacher's response especially developed during the research. His written feedback for lesson 2, early on in the course (*the metalanguage here is a barrier to explanation – I think it all needs to be couched in more accessible terms*) showed clearly that all participants would need time to adjust to the methodology and commitment to take full advantage of it. Butt et al. (2001:18) comment that 'it takes time and effort to learn this specialised language. It takes considerable professional judgement to decide how much of this specialised language to share with students in order to achieve optimum learning outcomes', but decisions of this type here were made by the researcher, as designer of the materials. This was probably a contributing factor to the

teacher's feelings of a lack of control at the outset; were the materials used again, by the same teacher, they would be taught more confidently because they would be more familiar. Eggins (2004:xiii) asserts that her professional teaching experiences forced her 'to reflect on how systemic linguistics can be made accessible to students who have no prior linguistic training but want ways of talking about how texts work', but to achieve this, teachers have to be confident of the usefulness of the content and of their ability to teach it.

Giving students the opportunity to engage with texts in a more demanding and academic way, should positively affect self-confidence and motivation to write. The metalanguage is part of this, providing students (and teachers) with very concrete and specific terminology for discussing language, and proving here much less problematic for the students than the teacher initially feared. In this respect, the methodology allows for flexibility: if the teacher preferred, the incorporation of additional metalanguage or the substitution of more traditional terminology would be feasible when using these materials again or other materials with the same research groups. Although the students here had studied language at school through more traditional methods, the grammatical labels and concepts they were familiar with were limited and not always helpful for SFL analyses. In line with these considerations, Halliday (1985) discusses the problem of writing about language:

There is no adequate statement of the meaning of grammatical category. Concepts like Theme and Subject and New, or the various types of process in transitivity, cannot be definitively glossed in ordinary wording.

(Halliday, 1985:xxxiii)



Whereas the Communicative method has perhaps struggled to identify a clear teacher role, the methodology here is unambiguous: the teacher's role is critical, demanding, and considerably more interventionist. If the teacher's initial apprehensions were transmitted to the students, this was not necessarily with negative long-term consequences. The construction of knowledge through reflection on the familiar and incorporation of the new is fundamental to learning; if students and teachers can move together effectively through similar doubts and challenges, within a context allowing for appropriate scaffolding, then a closer classroom relationship and greater self-confidence should result:

*I feel more comfortable than months ago*

*I feel a little more sure and I can explain more things*

*I'm feeling better than when I started the course*

Butt et al. (2001:259-260) highlight these ideas of collaboration and scaffolding as pivotal to Vygotsky's theory, and incorporated into the writings of educationalists such as Bruner: 'through collaboration and scaffolding, learners experience what it is like to participate in the 'whole' of what is being learnt – contributing what they can while the teacher takes responsibility for the rest'. The qualitative feedback, especially from lower-level students, confirms that appropriate scaffolding ensured the teaching and learning goals were achievable, despite the demands of the activities and language analysis. As confidence increased, participants were able to engage positively with the materials, despite the initial distrust or uneasiness referred to above.

*Even though time to practise this exercises has been limited and I can not measure how useful they have been for improving my writings I should say that I find the fact of searching for new teaching methodologies quite interesting*

Cohen et al. (2006) discuss issues of 'ownership' and 'involvement' in connection with teachers and research; teacher participation (and, by implication, the teacher-researcher relationship) was a fundamental part of the present study, and instrumental in the student responses. The research focuses on student writing, but also, by implication, on reading, because the link is stronger than suggested in normal courses. A primary teacher concern was that the course should be more 'communicative', meaning less emphasis on reading and writing, and more on speaking. The results raise questions about the type of knowledge appropriate at different levels, and at the beginning the teacher felt that the language areas focussed upon might be inaccessible to students. These doubts were not echoed in the student feedback, however, which suggested that, with scaffolding, an understanding of the role of Theme type and progression is possible across the participating levels, in line with the Vygotskian view of learning. If successful, this process of scaffolding and the resulting knowledge will contribute to the development of 'self-regulatory mechanisms for writing', so that students become 'more effective, flexible, and autonomous writers' (Johns, 2006:168). Butt et al. (2001:152) comment that understanding textual grammar and how language is organized is a 'powerful tool for managing the meanings of texts which are just beyond their current level of language proficiency ... an understanding of Theme can increase the comprehensible input accessible to students'. This viewpoint encapsulates the link between the research focus here and the Vygotskian concepts of ZPD and scaffolding.

It is via the analysis of texts that we are able to increase our understanding of the linguistic system and of how it enables speakers and writers to produce and process coherent meaning.

(Bloor and Bloor, 2004:6)

At the centre of the methodology was the use of whole texts, rather than decontextualised and/or short stretches of language, together with the belief that students are capable of and enjoy engaging in critical analyses of textual organisation, above and beyond the 'linkers' commonly presented in course books. The qualitative feedback supports this, especially at level 3, and there might be a case for adapting or supplementing the materials with texts for beginner and lower-intermediate students:

it is also helpful if the tasks can be performed at differing levels, so that learners with different levels of proficiency are equally challenged by the activity.

(Paltridge, 2004:101)

This would encourage students to become accustomed to a text-based approach from the start, making the intermediate level materials used here more accessible and laying the foundations for a more detailed and complex exploration of textual organisation at higher levels:

knowledge of textual grammar and thematic progression helps student readers and writers to develop the critical skills they need to evaluate the 'readability' of a written text – both their own texts and those of others.

(Butt et al., 2001:157)

Overall, results show that students are able to understand and manage a critical orientation to text; they can engage with demanding but well-written texts, and many responded positively to a topic not normally found in course books. The materials design and the questionnaire analysis support the idea that developing reading, and especially a familiarisation with the type of text incorporated within the materials, will help develop academic writing. The models that students are provided with in the classroom are therefore fundamental. At the start of the study, the teacher commented that many students find reading (in both L1 and L2) boring, and that they are unused to dealing with academic texts. Shaw et al. (1998) conclude that students may lack exposure to English formal writing, while Yang (2001:452) discusses 'the natural link between extensive reading and academic writing'. McGee (2009) also makes this link, suggesting that one reason why students resort to repetition is because simplified texts lack the richness of lexical cohesive ties found in academic writing. This repetition was observed in the initial study, where non-native texts used more repeated Themes. Repetition, nonetheless, should not be conflated with predictability, which is an important element of cohesion, linked to reader expectation. The pilot study suggested that native speaker texts exhibit a more predictable and less diverse choice of Theme with thematic ideas developed within the Rheme. Non-native Themes were sometimes unpredictable, connoting a series of disconnected ideas rather than a cohesive argument. If we believe as teachers that writing is of value, then finding ways to encourage reading is imperative.

### 7.3 Interpersonal meanings

*It (the course) helped me because it give me additional information and different points of view to writing*



*I feel more confident and it's easier for me to express what I want to say*

Once we bring in inherently messy issues such as the relationship between speakers or the influence of the preceding clause on the wording of the present one, the uncertainty increases exponentially.

(Thompson, 2004:251)

Interpersonal Themes bring together ideas of Theme choice and progression, within an area of the research which is complex and demanding for students and teacher. The language items are familiar, but they are dealt with distinctly: relationships between discrete areas of meaning within the same language item or clause are not usually clearly established in course books.

The same clauses, clause complexes, or texts can be explored from both an ideational perspective and an interpersonal one. The difference in perspective brings into focus different language items, or different aspects of the same language items.

(Coffin et al., 2009:347)

Similarly, Halliday and Hasan (1976) discuss conjunctions and interpersonal meanings, within the context of the choices involved:

when we use conjunction as a means of creating text, we may exploit either the relations that are inherent in the phenomena that language is used to talk about, or those that are inherent in the communication process, in the forms of interaction between speaker and hearer.

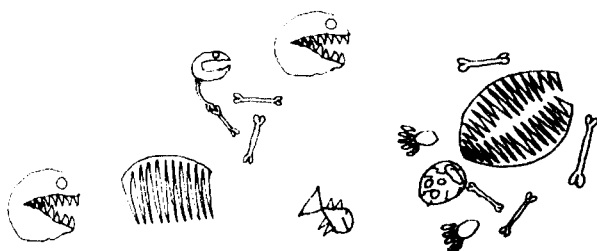
(Halliday and Hasan, 1976:241)

Within the analysis, problems with categorisation arose precisely because of these multiple layers and interrelatedness of meanings within language, and interpersonal meanings became more salient as the research progressed. The initial stages of materials design did not isolate this area for particular focus, nor contemplate developing this function more than the other textual metafunctions of ideational or textual meaning (cf Halliday, 1985, Butt et al., 2001). As the materials developed, however, it became increasingly obvious that although the research focus was not specifically on modality, interpersonal meanings embedded within the texts were functioning in very powerful and significant ways. This is a language learning area which can be problematic if managed clumsily; Hyland (2002b) comments that

the claim is made that non-native writers employ rhetorical progressions and interpersonal features in expository prose that do not match the expectations of native speakers and may therefore operate as barriers to effective communication.

Hyland (2002b:37)

The classroom methodology forces the student to look at language as functional, and texts as written (or spoken) always for a purpose. The purpose may be 'a clear, pragmatic one ... or a less tangible, but equally important, interpersonal one (such as 'needing' to have a chat with friends after a long day at work' (Egins, 2004:5). For Paltridge (2004:54), 'a focus on audience is especially important in second language writing classrooms'. The reader-writer relationship is therefore pivotal and is present either explicitly (lesson 8) or implicitly across the materials, causing some difficulty for both students and teachers at the beginning:



Look at the *Evidence for Evolution* – then text from last lesson. Discuss the following questions together, and make notes of your answers.

1. Where is the text from? What is the context?
2. Who is writing it, and why?
3. Who is going to read it? Why would they read it?
4. What type of text is it? What is its purpose?

Lesson 3 (p.9)

An awareness of audience, which implies an understanding that language functions within and because of a reader-writer relationship, is at the heart of SFL. Nonetheless, Paltridge (2004:53) asserts that ‘the issue of audience is not widely discussed in much ESL research or taken up in many ESL courses’, despite the fact that many authors agree on the importance of ‘readership awareness’ (ibid:55) and the link between the notion of a projected audience and the construction of meanings (cf Hyland, 2002b). Paltridge (ibid.:53) goes on to comment that Swales and Feak ‘place audience at the top of their list of considerations’ of an overview of significant characteristics of written genres. Other



relationships can also be defined with reference to interpersonal meanings: Butt et al. (2001), for example, describe the teacher-student relationship as understood in terms of interpersonal grammar. This extension and application of meanings from the text outward is a unifying and valuable feature of functional grammar which can illuminate classroom interactions for teachers and students, helping them to understand how the language involved influences and is influenced by the participating roles and relationships.

Understanding how texts position their audience and promote, or make invisible, particular points of view enables students to evaluate the texts of others and to experiment with revealing and challenging different meanings and world views in their own texts.

Butt et al. (2001:50)

Nevertheless, Harwood (2005:154) cites corpus-based studies which found that modality was often dealt with 'summarily' in EAP textbooks, and that the function and role of this language area was neither clearly established nor explained.

This reader-writer relationship seems also to be embedded in many areas of the results, highlighting the correlation between interpersonal Themes and progression types as a concrete and easily-identified example of how interpersonal meanings function. Hyland (2002b:12) comments that 'we must draw on some notion of shared assumptions to account for the recognisable connectedness of texts'. This was the area of writing most affected by the teaching input, with outcomes including the textual changes described above reflecting important components of cohesion. The increase in cross-referential progression and the approximation of the two progression types establish a basis for further investigation: these are among the clearest findings, and are potentially useful

considerations for students in accessing and producing academic texts. As one of the categories emerging from the data, Thematised comment also illustrated interesting changes. Results indicate a link with progression changes, supported by qualitative feedback citing structure and text development as areas of interest. The relevance of this relationship between Thematised Comment and Interpersonal Themes might provide a focus for future research and classroom application.

These results suggest that teaching materials should contemplate both Thematic areas (type and progression), introducing students to the contribution of each to overall cohesion. Additionally, the fusing of Topical and Interpersonal Theme within the analysis of Appraisal, and the possible movement from personal to impersonal voice (cf Knapp and Watkins 2005) together with the Constant Theme changes, are all features of the research results which enter territory relatively unexplored in current course books, but central to SFL. Differences between pre- and post-test scores imply that the materials were at least a contributing factor to the above changes. Because the effect was greater at higher than at lower level, the content might be adjusted in the future for more specific work with lower-level students (although they were the most enthusiastic in their feedback). This difference in effect across levels was partly a predictable result of group changes from the original design, which included level 4 (upper intermediate), rather than level 3, but which was revised in the absence of a level 4 control group. Butt et al. (2001:128) assert that ‘the expression of interpersonal meaning in English is a very complex area of grammar, and very hard to pin down’. Given this complexity, and also the emergence of a central role for this area within the study, further research might take interpersonal meaning together with additional features such as nominalisation or reference (introduced in lesson 2) to explore in more detail. These are features which contribute to textual cohesion, but become clearer when explored together, within the

context of a complete text. Considerations of their contribution to text construction are relevant to current procedures, course book writing and selection and curriculum design, and it seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that courses should incorporate more systematically and in greater depth an exploration and explanation of these areas of meaning.

Perhaps, ultimately, one of the main effects of the materials is this raising of awareness and the resulting widening of options: authors agree that an understanding of the presence and use of interpersonal meaning is necessary for an informed reading and response to texts and for successful text construction, and that this is only viable through an exploration of whole texts. Coffin et al. (2009:382) comment that 'Interpersonal meanings are spread throughout a clause, and evaluation accumulates through a text'. So classroom materials need to include longer texts, and fewer exercises based around isolated sentences. The area of Appraisal, often limited to decontextualised sentences with modals, for example, can thus be treated more efficiently and comprehensively (cf Bloor and Bloor, 2004, Butt et al. 2001). Focussing on how meanings are organised within a clause and then how clauses link together will encourage students to consider more systematically and clearly the contribution of specific Theme types or patterns in their own writing.

The classroom input will have been beneficial if students are able to manage a wider range of options for expressing interpersonal meaning; a critical perspective on genre will help clarify how they are being positioned by a text, 'what a text might assume of them and how they can present a particular position, should they wish to do so' (Paltridge, 2004:122). Only if able to recognise this aspect of positioning, will students be able to

control whether or not they align themselves with the writer's stance (Butt et al., 2001).

Paltridge (2004) comments that

empowering learners through making explicit the way in which writers make their meanings gives learners access to the "hidden curriculum" of education and power.

Paltridge (2004:68)

Discursive texts, which encompass the ability to formulate and respond to argument, are required here for coursework and examinations, and might conceivably feature in students' future professional lives:

the genre of arguing is an important and influential language process, essential for dealing with many aspects of school knowledge and effective social participation.

(Knapp and Watkins, 2005:187)

Interpersonal Themes have been isolated as contributing fundamentally to the expression of opinion and argument (Lock, 1996, Coffin et al., 2009, Hyland, 2006), but their role is more extensive than this: as the above authors all discuss, understanding and managing this Theme-type has important implications for cohesion too.

## 7.4 Cohesion

*I think that I have improved my writing structure*

*It helped me with new vocabulary and expressions and found them easier. It also helped me to organise better my compositions*

The research originated from an awareness of the difficulties faced by students and teachers in developing the writing skill and the idea that these problems may stem from a misunderstanding of how language is organised. The emphasis on discrete sentences and isolated vocabulary items in many course books, together with the mainly non-academic text-types, often prevents a reading of texts on anything but a very superficial level. Bloor and Bloor (2004:223) cite work on cohesion following the publication of *Cohesion in English* as 'probably the most widespread Hallidayan influence on language teaching.' They assert that many cohesive devices in EFL textbooks were formerly either not taught systematically or not taught at all, but that they feature nowadays in most reading and writing courses and all general course books. Questions remain, however, concerning the methodology and efficacy of this content, certainly within EFL course books; the selection criterion for features building cohesion (and, by implication, coherence) and the extent to which students are able to understand and manipulate these devices, are areas open to research.

A primary research premise was that the type of text students are expected to read will determine the type of text they will be able to write. If we ask students to produce cohesive, clearly organised appropriate texts within the classroom or for an examination, then these texts must first appear as a central coursework component. Lee (2002) claims that coherence is an essential element of good writing, but difficult to teach, remaining a

'fuzzy concept' (ibid.:135) where there is little consensus. This may be an argument for making classroom practice more specific, perhaps by focussing on elements such as Theme and Rheme.

Exploring the discussion genre, Coffin et al. (2009) suggest that

it is only through ongoing exposure to, and practice in, writing such texts that young writers learn to write in more textually sophisticated ways.

(Coffin et al., 2009:408)

Discursive texts were chosen for the compositions, although the task could have used another genre; it was felt that it is often easier for students to identify a clear thread within a model of this text-type, and then to establish this thread in their own writing. The qualitative feedback suggested that students view positively the emphasis on this aspect of writing, which also links very clearly with the interpersonal meanings described above. For Halliday and Hasan,

it is the continuity provided by cohesion that enables the reader or listener to supply all the missing pieces, all the components of the picture which are not present in the text but are necessary to its interpretation.

(Halliday and Hasan, 1976:299)

Changes in Thematic choice and progression outlined in chapter 6 indicate that student writing is receptive to the materials input, and that language need not be simplified or de-contextualised for change to occur. The 'longer and more complex' texts (see below) provided more opportunities to illustrate how distinct cohesive devices such as

'connectives, reference and theme' (Knapp and Watkins 2005:196) work in combination to create texts which unfold clearly and logically. Student feedback did not suggest that they would have preferred shorter or easier texts, or that the texts were in general beyond their ZPD.

*The main differences are topics (I like Darwin very much) and texts are longer and more complex than in coursebook. In my opinion these differences are good*

But to understand how cohesion functions within a text, it is necessary to take into account other features. The classroom materials encouraged the students to examine familiar language items in unfamiliar ways: discussing cohesion, Thompson (2004:189) outlines two approaches to exploring conjunctions. The first involves a concentration on the 'textual linkers' usually described in course books while the second assumes an understanding of the cohesive relationship between a clause and those clauses around it: 'this approach will lead us to identify a set of cohesive signals that include some which are not traditionally counted as conjunctive items'. Textual Themes were the Theme type providing some of the impetus for the study, but, ultimately, they were not the most important cohesive element. In line with the ideas underlying the research, and despite the importance attributed to them in course books, this Theme type probably represents quite a small part of cohesion. As discussed above, changes in the use of *because* with the CAE experimental group suggest recourse to different options, perhaps indicating that exposure to the classroom materials texts is providing more choice.



## 7.5 Fuzziness, choice and context

*The materials were different from those I've always used, so sometimes it was a little difficult*

In doing functional grammar, you will often feel that you are groping round in the dark, unsure of whether you are interpreting the meaning of a wording correctly, or identifying the differences in meaning between two different wordings accurately. I have frequently mentioned uncertain or fuzzy cases where 2 analyses (or a blend of them both) seem equally appropriate...

(Thompson, 2004:251)

In the above assessment, Thompson highlights SFL features which have both determined and explained the analysis here, and which are embedded in the classroom materials. The research process involved choices not always unequivocal: chapter 4 describes cases where the lengthy and complex analysis of a particular language item concluded in what was, ultimately, a necessarily subjective final decision. The analytical system was made as transparent and consistent as possible, and it is hoped that where doubts exist, these do not detract from or invalidate the overall findings. Every attempt was made to ensure reliability and validity, but still there are language items or clauses whose functions might reasonably be interpreted distinctly. Indeed, were the experiment repeated, these cases might be approached with different criteria. The 'fuzziness' Thompson describes has to be accepted 'as an inherent and central feature of language, without which it could not function effectively as a system of communication' (ibid.) and incorporated into linguistic description. This acceptance holds true for teachers, learners and researchers, because

unrealistic expectations about how language operates can generate a quest for a conclusiveness within teaching and learning methods which is distracting and futile (Thompson's 'illusory definitiveness', *ibid.*:190), and which fundamentally misunderstands (and so disregards) the relationship between language and situation: 'no particular feature can be said to be a marker of good writing because good writing is contextually variable' (Hyland, 2002b:10).

The inter-relatedness of choices is significant, especially in EAP, where the tendency is to isolate categories and present language items out of context, rather than to see a text as a tapestry of meanings, interwoven and mutually dependent. For Coffin et al. (2009:195), expectations about how language works often fail to take into account the context, resulting in a 'mismatch between context and form'. SFL can highlight the reasons for these mismatches, and help students locate and understand the source of the problems, leading them away from a simplistic concentration on de-contextualised language items. Hinkel (2003:275) asserts that one of the difficulties in teaching ESL students to write in an appropriate academic style is that 'research has not established with certainty what specific syntactic and lexical features, when taken together, can create an impression of a seemingly simplistic or reasonably sophisticated text in written L2 discourse'. Textual cohesion results from distinct and varying features working in combination, and perhaps lower level students, with less experience of other methodologies and their corresponding differences in expectations, tolerate this uncertainty more. So the qualitative and quantitative feedback sometimes illustrates almost a dichotomy: the ZPD of higher-level students was more often captured, but lower-level students were more enthusiastic and, by implication, more accepting of this inconclusiveness or 'fuzziness'.

Nonetheless, one of the doubts expressed by the teacher at the beginning was the seeming complexity of the ideas, partly because of the metalanguage through which these concepts were conveyed but also because of the exercise type. Responses to the lesson 1 activity cited as difficult by the teacher (reproduced in part in section 3, above), depend on a very different type of analysis from that demanded from traditional course books; the answers themselves are more complex and, perhaps ‘fuzzy’. The question, then, is the one raised by Johns (2001):

How do we help students to work with the knowledge that ‘text reconstructs ... a world’ (Kress, 1995), and that rhetorical context causes texts to differ?

(Johns, 2001:36)

The language-context relationship so fundamental to SFL can probably only be conveyed through systematic and detailed exploration of diverse text-types. The study has attempted to draw teacher and student attention to the layers of meaning within texts and to set these texts at the centre of the lesson. Perspectives emerging over the past few years suggest that, whatever the approach used, the link between language and context, and the options available to the writer need to be established, for texts to be successfully constructed or understood. More investigation is needed to determine whether the classroom input increases levels of student confidence and aptitude in the future and/or affects subsequent exam results.

An important aspect of the materials is that no lesson attempts to cover exhaustively the use and function of any language item in isolation; the role of context, and the potential (indeed likelihood) of this context to vary, allows for tendencies and guidelines, but very little certainty. This is tied up with the notion that rules are expressed as choice, because

‘unless we do see language as choice there is no principled way in which we can link it with context: if context and language are interdependent, different linguistic choices must be available to reflect and construct different contexts’ (Thompson, 2004:248). Nonetheless, without an understanding of why choices exist, or of how they operate within language production and comprehension, the process can create uncertainty and confusion for both teacher and student. Bloor and Bloor (2004) and Thompson (2004) comment that this selection process is not necessarily conscious: we draw on forms available to us as speakers/writers, without being aware of choosing some options and rejecting others. The materials aim to show that ‘meaning arises from the way that the choices which are made acquire value in relation to the choices that are not made’ (Coffin et al., 2009:231) and results especially for Interpersonal Themes and cross-referential progression indicate that participants were encouraged to exercise more choice and to experiment (for this reason, unsuccessful attempts were included).

The teacher’s comment that the work on Theme and Rheme ‘opened their (*the students*)’ eyes to a text being more than just a bunch of words on a page’, reflects an understanding of the complexity and richness of language, and perhaps some recognition of the role of a functional model of language in making and evaluating meaning. This does not mean that the model has to be wholly accepted or exclusively employed: Dockrell (1988:65) suggests that research is unlikely to be prescriptive, but will often contribute to an ‘examination of the options’. This study was not concerned with rejecting existing materials or ideologies, but rather with investigating alternative explanations and solutions and developing teacher and student curiosity and insight, both within the immediate research context and in relation to the teaching of writing more generally.

## 7.6. Effects and outcomes

*I think that the materials have been better to improve our writing*

The implications of the research for professional practice and education policy can be determined with reference to both the materials designed for the research and the results emerging from the study. These results suggest that a reconsideration of the way that writing is taught and a clarification of the skills and understanding needed by the students would be possible within a framework of Systemic Functional Analysis. Nonetheless, and as an extension of this, there is also a need to rethink how teachers are equipped to put into practice these ideas, and how they can be encouraged to manage new concepts and materials effectively and with confidence. Teacher training and teacher education provide a space for this, and for the research to contribute in any significant way to future classroom practice, the materials and results need primarily to be relevant in these contexts and made available to them.

One of the main centres offering teacher training courses for native and non-native teachers here in Spain is International House, Barcelona, and the following information is taken from their website, <http://www.ih.com/bcn/>. The content for two of the courses offered is given as follows:

### *Teaching Writing Skills for Exam Classes*

- Approaches to writing: process, product and genre
- Paragraphing and sentence types
- Punctuation
- Coherence

- Cohesion
- Correction of written work

The presence of genre approaches, coherence and cohesion on this list, suggests that these concepts and methodological considerations are relevant to what is happening in teacher training at the moment. Another online course includes the following areas of study selected by the course tutors:

#### *Language Analysis for English Teachers*

- Phrase types (the verb phrase, the noun phrase etc)
- Modality
- Text analysis for cohesion and coherence
- Analysing language as discourse
- Grammatical descriptions (Traditional, Structural, Lexical etc)

The above indicates a concern with modality, cohesion and coherence, and also the analysis of texts beyond the sentence level. These considerations are echoed in the research here and highlighted by Thompson (2004). He asserts that functional grammar is designed for application, and can help evaluate and clarify both the assessment process and choice of language features for teaching. The potential for the research results here to impact upon future course content and methodology will depend upon the identification of an appropriate teaching–learning context in which teachers are prepared to work with new concepts and incorporate these to a greater or lesser extent into their classroom practice. An understanding of functional grammar can help teachers ‘develop explicit criteria for designing language courses’ (Butt et al., 2001:268), and offer a

different and complementary perspective to the exploration of language areas listed in the courses above. Thompson (2004) comments that:

The overall view of language from the functional grammar perspective has fuelled the Communicative Language Teaching movement, and, in many cases, insights on specific areas such as cohesion, modality and Theme choice have in fact been adapted for practical use in the classroom.

(Thompson, 2004:250)

As part of the research feedback, the teacher commented that 'a teacher with no knowledge of SFL would have struggled ... you need a grounding to teach it confidently', and suggested that the materials might be more appropriate for teacher training rather than for use with students. Nonetheless, student questionnaire feedback indicated that students found the metalanguage less problematic than the teacher predicted, so that this feature of SFL may not be a barrier. (Derewianka and Jones (2010:14) comment that 'while teachers might baulk initially at some of the unfamiliar terminology and concepts, students tend to take them in their stride and use them productively').

Authors such as Knapp and Watkins (2005), Paltridge (2004) and Butt et al. (2001) discuss and explore classroom practices and identify ways in which teachers and students can work toward a greater and clearer understanding of writing (and, indeed, all skills). Although they devote some attention to the initial preparation and development of materials and information, teacher training practices and methodologies are not dealt with extensively in the literature overall, where the focus is rather on classroom activities and on the practical application of the theoretical ideas developed in training sessions. Although Paltridge includes a chapter on 'Directions for Further Research and



Development', and discusses 'the issue of teacher-knowledge' (p122), he does not explore in depth the type of teacher training and education available to teachers. Harwood (2005:151) suggests that 'the textbook and the teacher's notes should serve to raise less experienced teachers' awareness of pedagogical issues'; the materials from the present study might also extend the more experienced teachers' understanding into new areas. It may be possible to incorporate them either into initial teacher training courses, or within in-service training, in combination with publications such as Butt et al. (2001) and Bloor and Bloor (2004), for example, written for English language teachers and students.

My role in this study was that of an outsider, but with consistent contact with the teacher. There were both advantages and disadvantages in this (discussed in section 3.3.3.), but the fact that teacher and researcher roles were separate did allow for broader reflexivity and a consideration of different responses to the research. It was important to maintain a balance between ensuring that the research questions were sufficiently concrete and specific, so that the teacher understood clearly the purposes of the study, and allowing for the teacher's individual interpretation and prioritization in teaching the materials. The researcher role was perhaps more complex than had been anticipated, but was ultimately determined and constrained by the nature of the study. Hellawell discusses 'subtly varying shades of 'insiderism' and 'outsiderism'' (2006:489) within 'a series of insider-outsider continua' (ibid.:492), and this was reflected in the research here, particularly with regard to the teacher's perception of the roles and relationship. My role was seen as that of teacher and ex-colleague, so to some extent as participant, but also as the author of the materials and as researcher.

The materials and research results are potentially relevant not only within the immediate Spanish context, but to English language teachers and learners in general. This wider relevance will be realised through publication or presentation (at conferences or teacher training sessions) to potentially interested groups. An article about the research and the findings will be produced and disseminated via ELT journals and other publications more specifically directed toward Applied Linguistics or SFL. Different audiences exist, both in Spain and beyond, and different types of publication will be appropriate, depending on the reader. The academic journal articles will be designed to reach teacher trainers, and the professional journal articles for teachers interested in translating theory into classroom practice.

Reviewing a series of publications for use within teacher education, Jenkins and Murray discuss the importance of encouraging student teachers to reflect upon the relationship between theoretical discussion and classroom pedagogy:

Informed teaching practice develops when student teachers are given the opportunity to carefully scrutinize and familiarize themselves with influential concepts and ideas in language teaching.

(Jenkins and Murray, 1998:246)

They also highlight the distinction between education and training, citing Widdowson's definitions of training as concerned with 'established patterns of knowledge and behaviour', and education as centred more on creativity. (ibid.:248). The educational theory and teaching methodology covered during training can be scrutinized in greater depth and developed within teacher education. It is important that new materials are developed and used for teacher training and education programmes, especially if, as has been discussed within this research, there are inconsistencies between expectations and

results in the area of writing. Harwood (2005:150) comments on a 'lack of fit between how academic writers write and what the textbooks teach about writing', while Derewianka and Jones (2010:13) point to an 'urgent need for more materials' and emphasise the importance of teacher education: 'professional development programs need to be substantial and ongoing and need to address pedagogy as well as knowledge' (ibid.:13-14).

Researchers support the idea that SFL materials can help student performance: 'importantly for English language learners, SFL assists teachers in supporting learners' development of academic language' (Derewianka and Jones, 2010:12). Gebhard explores teacher education from an SFL perspective, and describes how SFL is being used by researchers and teacher educators in the USA to support ESL and content teachers, 'using EFL tools to deconstruct the meaning of history textbook passages and primary source documents' (2010:799). Researchers found that those students whose teachers participated in the project performed better in state exams than those students whose teachers were not involved in the sessions, and that English language students were among those showing the greatest improvements. Bloor and Bloor cite Halliday's example of the use of the word *growth*, to illustrate how our attitudes and perceptions of the world around us are determined by and reflected in the language we use:

modern societies use the word *grow* with favourable connotations even when writing about activities that may not be good for the planet in any real long-term ways ... what might appear to be a standard – even objective – form is in fact coloured by a stock of opinions and attitudes.

(Bloor and Bloor, 2004:228)

In the EIM, where students come from all faculties within the university, there is a need for an approach to language learning which illuminates and explores all text types and which enables teachers to understand and convey the relevance of this understanding for all their students.

Many settings offer opportunities for ongoing teacher education, and where this is available, the materials used in this research might be integrated into existing sessions on writing or used independently. Alternatively, they might be made available as a homework, rather than classroom, resource, which would allow for an assessment of their appropriateness as a supplementary resource within a less teacher-directed environment. And, finally, another possible context would be schools. Butt et al. (2001:276) comment on the importance of current research into 'the analysis of student writing and the problems of student writers at various levels of education: primary, secondary, tertiary'. Within schools where English is the L1 (and there are several, in and around the Barcelona area), academic writing continues to be a concern. A report of a study into what higher education wants from the A-level exam system in schools in England, issued in April 2012 (<http://www.bbc-co.uk/news/education>) identifies 'academic writing' as one of three weaknesses making students unprepared for university study. In classrooms where students have English as an additional language (EAL) or a foreign language, SFL can help teachers and students to engage with texts across the curriculum. Coffin (2010) asserts that:

An awareness of the literacy demands of school subjects is in fact important for all teachers, regardless of the linguistic background of their students and regardless of whether they are a subject or EAL specialist. This is because the ability to see how language shapes our construction of the world and experience, our relationship with others

and the packaging and organizing of our messages and meanings places teachers and students in a strong position to reflect critically on the language interactions they participate in, the texts they read and they write (and very often in the case of teachers, the texts they choose).

(Coffin, 2010:3)

If the use of materials such as those designed for this study can introduce teachers to the richness of language and a deeper understanding of how its patterns influence every text that we read, they may be encouraged to show students how this affects their understanding of texts in all areas of their studies.

### *7.7 Syllabus and materials design and assessment*

*The materials have given to us a more theoretical explanation and coursebook doesn't*

The above sections focus on classroom application, but the findings are relevant also to curriculum and syllabus design, within ongoing educational research and practice. Although internal and/or external examination and course requirements generally determine the course design process, it is hoped that the study has highlighted potential choices for classroom learning perhaps not included in traditional course books. Hammersley (2011) discusses the need to avoid a 'one-off study', and the aim is for the materials to be incorporated systematically into more EIM courses, or used as intensive courses in their own right. Results need to be 'usable and shareable by participants' (Cohen et al., 2006:228). Paltridge (2004) comments that teacher decisions about course content are dependent on individual teaching situations, but the experience here with the experimental groups is an important impetus for future use of the materials. There is

also scope for incorporating the approach and materials into teacher-training courses within the EIM, as suggested by the teacher. Although course books are constructed around different expectations for different levels, this feature of language learning needs to be made more specific within all areas of language. The research results show that the ideas and activities in the materials can be made accessible to different levels, and may even be more readily accepted by lower levels. As discussed above, the interpretation of language items such as Textual Themes is often complex, and real understanding is likely to be built up systematically and gradually, over time, through the construction of knowledge (cf Mercer, 2004).

The investigation has attempted to address concerns current within EAP in general, but also those explicitly related to the more immediate context and EAP within the Spanish higher education system. A recent article in the Spanish newspaper *La Razon* (Ramírez, 2011) discusses course design changes for school leavers choosing work-orientated courses rather than the traditional academic university qualifications. English will now be a compulsory component, moving perhaps toward EAP rather than general English: *'en todos los ciclos está prevista la incorporación de lenguas extranjeras adaptadas a los contenidos curriculares específico de cada titulación.* ('All course modules will in future include a foreign language (English implied) component adapted to suit the specific curriculum requirements of each qualification'). These modifications address the issue of language function: there is a growing awareness that students need to understand how context affects and determines the texts they encounter. Nevertheless, the 'adaptation' of language to suit specific course contexts is more complex than implied here.

The study will contribute to existing knowledge of the writing process through its specific focus on Theme and Rheme and also, and perhaps more importantly, through its

attempts to lay the foundations for a much deeper teacher and student understanding of cohesion. Insights from authors working within a genre or text-based tradition, especially those able to link SFL concepts to the process of teaching and learning, provide an invaluable context for the type of small-scale study presented here. The results may not be generalisable in their entirety across a wide range of classrooms, but there is nothing to suggest that the teacher and student responses might not be replicated in other settings, especially (although not exclusively) perhaps where the L1 is the same and the learning history and goals coincide.

There are also implications for assessment, especially in relation to the considerations of metalanguage discussed throughout the report. Butt et al. (2001:261) see metalanguage as clarifying and demystifying both curriculum and assessment, so that it becomes possible to describe more explicitly and consistently what is expected of students within their coursework and final examinations, which is where the rationale for this study began. This was not a comparative study, but it will be interesting to discuss future use of the materials with the teacher and co-ordinators, and perhaps consider incorporation into assessment procedures. Although not a stated component of the study, assessment reflects and determines course content, and both underlie the choice of writing-types for the materials and compositions. If the course were used more widely within the EIM, teachers and course coordinators might work together to design an assessment model for the internal exams around the concepts explored in the materials, to encourage evaluation of written texts as coherent wholes, rather than a conjunction of isolated sentences. Bloor and Bloor (2004) and Thompson (2004) discuss this idea of text evaluation, with Thompson stressing the direct application of functional grammar in providing 'a basis for educational decisions' (ibid.:250).



## 7.8 Other applications and future research

*Learning with different methods can increase our capacity*

For the findings to be relevant to other settings within a wider research context, the methodology has to be accessible to teachers with different theoretical backgrounds (mainly the Communicative Approach), both native and non-native, and those working in a first language and foreign language context:

the issue of teacher knowledge becomes more complex when teachers are not native speakers of the language they are teaching and when they are teaching in a community in which the target language is not spoken.

(Paltridge, 2004:122)

Although the teacher here was a native English speaker, this is not the case for all EIM teachers, or, clearly, for many EFL and EAP practitioners in other settings. The materials were constructed with this in mind, deliberately avoiding topics potentially perceived as very culturally-bound, and qualitative feedback suggested that the students generally found the lessons motivating:

*The main differences are topics (I like Darwin very much) and texts are longer and more complex than in coursebook. In my opinion these differences are good*

*We spoke about Darwin and I learned some sort of technical words I've never read before*

*I really like Darwin units and I would like to read more about other important people*

The results should also be considered within the context of other first languages (cf Butt et al., 2001) as Spanish or Catalan L1 may have influenced or determined some findings.

Because the initial study identified specifically differences in Thematic type and progression between L1 English and Spanish speakers, the underlying research assumptions may be less immediately applicable to speakers of other languages. Paltridge (2004) suggests that students should be encouraged to identify genre systems in their own language; if this happens, cross-cultural comparisons then become possible, and the ideas presented in this research might be extended more widely. Paltridge also highlights 'a great shortage of genre-based descriptions in languages other than English, which could provide the basis for cross-cultural comparisons and for the teaching of genres in these particular languages' (ibid.:117).

Even though the linguistic concepts from this study might not be specifically reflected in other languages, an awareness of cohesion and the ability to understand how and why texts are organised as they are, cuts across languages. Halliday (1985) uses English as 'the language of illustration', and states that although language features may be universal, the descriptive categories showing how languages organise and use these features will be particular:

while all languages are assumed to have a 'textual' component, whereby discourse achieves a texture that relates it to its environment, it is not assumed that in any given language one of the ways of achieving texture will be by means of a thematic system ... even if there is such a system, the features in it (the choices) may not be the same; and even if a feature embodies the same choice, it may not be realized in the same way.

(Halliday, 1985:xxxiv)

There are identifiable differences in the way languages organise meaning, and understanding this is especially important if meaning is achieved distinctly in the students' L1. Coffin et al. (2009:398) comment that 'English and German differ in terms of the kinds of meaning that are usually placed in first position in a clause'. Paltridge (2004:118) points to variations in politeness strategies and 'differing relationships between the writers and the discourse community' in comparative studies of L1 and L2 writing in Spanish and English. Within the realm of interpersonal meanings, Bloor and Bloor (2004) comment that hedging is more common in English than in other languages, while Hyland (2002c) explores the management of interpersonal meaning within academic texts in connection with the negotiation of identity. All of these are complex and potentially confusing concepts for student writers, particularly where the conventions of their L1 and English do not coincide.

There are instances in the interpretation of the results where the focus is the language learning stage rather than the language itself, and the expectations are related to the level. Lock (1996:269), discussing findings in SLA explores the possibility 'that learners with different backgrounds (including different mother tongues) all learn certain second language structures according to the same relatively fixed sequence'. As suggested in chapter 6, the effect of the materials might therefore be to facilitate and direct and in some cases accelerate the learning process, rather than to alter it. This type of outcome is difficult to prove: it is impossible to evaluate with certainty the causes of all the changes, some of which may well have occurred anyway, but perhaps over a longer time period. There are changes which seem clearly to have resulted from the materials, and others which are less obviously related to the classroom input. Although the implications for teaching are easier to describe in the former, if these caveats are borne in mind the results remain interesting and viable; they would provide a basis for further investigation

into writing, perhaps within a more extended longitudinal study, and with different language levels, as discussed above. Paltridge (2004:79) asserts that 'classroom activities can also usefully draw on published results of genre analysis'.

It is also important to consider how to build upon those post-test composition changes which are directly attributable to the materials, within more traditional language classrooms. Results in areas such as Interpersonal Themes, for example, suggest that a decontextualised presentation of language items sometimes characteristic of the Communicative Approach fails to transmit the full importance of this area of meaning. Findings for Thematic progression also show that the materials have impacted here, in an area of coherence not covered in traditional courses or contemplated in examination and assessment processes. The research materials are likely to be used by teachers and students familiar with the Communicative Approach, so it will be useful to consider how this sort of input can be incorporated successfully into existing course content. There are instances in the scripts, for example, where the analysis could be integrated into a lesson exploring the effect on the reader of a smooth control of Thematic progression and of breaking reader expectation through the wrong Theme choice or a gap in a Thematic chain. It might therefore be possible to incorporate some of the students' own writing (with their permission) into future uses of the materials. This should increase motivation and encourage students to see their own work as interesting and valuable.

An assessment of the research needs to consider how those teacher and student expectations of language teaching and learning stemming from a Communicative methodology may have impacted on the overall success or otherwise of the experiment. The differences between a functional approach to language and the usual approaches followed at the EIM have been discussed: in the light of teacher feedback ('this needs to

be made more communicative'), some may be more difficult to reconcile than others. EIM general English courses are theoretically subject to modification and changes each academic year. Nonetheless, in practice they are usually fairly stable in terms of course-book type and teacher methodology, and the challenge will be to encourage an acceptance of functional materials within this more traditional context. The research will be worthwhile for EFL practitioners and students if it can contribute to an understanding of how texts are constructed, where our expectations as teachers and students come from, and how we can best integrate theory with practice to achieve these expectations. Teacher comments such as 'looking at language from a functional perspective is interesting' are encouraging, opening the door to further discussion and collaboration.

There is much scope for further studies, perhaps focussing on some of the more specific questions arising from the research here, and drawing on language areas dealt with in the materials such as appraisal, nominalisation and chains of reference. Small-scale studies can add to the overall body of knowledge by 'nibbling away at the larger questions ... which preoccupy our profession' (Hyland, 2002b:150). It would be possible to use the materials with other EIM groups, and involve a greater number of teachers. Additional research questions could be explored in the future with larger groups, for example, especially at higher levels, where the number of post-test compositions collected was limited, or with different levels. The materials could be adapted for use with lower-level students, primarily by simplifying some of the explanations, providing additional practice material for each lesson, and incorporating some of the student writing from the present study.

Following on from the discussion in section 7.6. above, research with trainee teachers might also be possible, especially for gathering qualitative information concerning teacher

confidence and motivational aspects of teaching writing. Gebhard (2010:800) suggests that teachers who participated in a summer training programme introducing 'key SFL concepts as well as strategies for teaching specific genres, such as recounts, narratives, and explanations', (ibid.:800) developed greater confidence. There may be opportunities here in Barcelona for using the research materials with teachers, either as part of their initial training, or within in-service education, and with EFL researchers. This study concentrated mainly on the students, but further research with a larger group of teachers could explore more deeply teacher reactions and attitudes toward the teaching of writing. Hyland (in interview with McDonough, 2005:58) comments that 'ELT teachers are beginning to look to EAP for answers to the sort of things that their students might need', and teacher and student feedback in this study did indicate a willingness to explore different methodologies, albeit with certain reservations on the part of the teacher.

If the type of further research discussed here were possible, it would be interesting in the future to hand over more responsibility for future investigation to the teachers themselves. There is no reason why teachers within the EIM should not be involved in the future with teaching the materials with their own groups, and working together within the department to evaluate their effectiveness: 'SFL is an on-going research project to which every practitioner can contribute' (Bloor and Bloor, 2004:231).

The restricted sample size, both for the groups as a whole and for each student, was a limitation of the study; (cf Storch and Tapper (2009:218) 'clearly a single text may not be representative of the students' writing ability'). Another limitation, perhaps, was the duration: 'some aspects of writing may need longer than 10-12 weeks to show improvement' (ibid.). Nonetheless, results show that the materials did effect changes in writing, albeit in some categories more than others, and might therefore provide the

impetus for the type of empirical research called for by Tardy and echoed by authors such as Hyon and Hyland. For Tardy, genre studies 'have so far remained primarily theoretical and anecdotal' (2006:89) and this study has tried to begin to address these concerns. Although important, the implications for classroom practice, educational policy and future research are not always easy to define. The conclusions drawn here construe the results as a potential focus either for future classroom work or for ongoing research. But, through the qualitative feedback and the quantitative results, the research is also evaluated as worthwhile for its own sake, and especially for the sake of those who participated.

If I have to write something in English I still feel like if I had to climb a mountain. However, this mountain is smaller now than one year ago, and that's obviously a great thing



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

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### *Initial study results*

**Topical Themes:** both groups of texts were analysed for the use of personal pronouns and 'there' and 'people', as topical Theme, as together these accounted for many of the simple topical Themes.

**Textual Themes:** the native speaker average of 4.0 per text compares with 5.2 for non-native texts.

**Marked Themes:** native-speaker texts exhibit more variety. Circumstantial Themes (realized by prepositional phrases and adverbial groups) (cf Eggins, (2004:222), Bloor and Bloor, (2004:131)) account for 21 of the Marked Themes in native texts, and 22 in non-native, yielding similar averages (2.1 and 2.2. respectively). Of the 22 non-native uses, however, 13 (59%) are *nowadays, today or now*.

Results show that native speaker texts contain more *clauses* as Theme, with an average of 1.2 per text, compared with 0.8 per non-native text. Ellipsed Theme within clause complexes was exclusive to native-speaker texts, with an average of 1.8 per text.

**Interpersonal Themes:** Initial analyses suggest that non-native texts might rely more on modal and comment Adjuncts as Theme to express position within an argument, while native speakers are more likely to use Modal Finites (cf Butt et al.,2001).

# Appendix 2

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## *Information for students*

Hello,

My name is Sue, and I used to work in the EIM. At the moment I am involved in a research project looking at writing with the Open University in Britain, and I have asked Sean if he would work with me. He has agreed, and so now I am writing to you to ask for your permission to carry out the research with you, as students.

The research deals especially (but not exclusively) with discursive texts, and it involves using classroom materials which adopt a slightly different methodology to the one you may be used to. This approach is called is a genre (or text-based) approach; many of the activities and exercises will be similar to those you normally find in your course books, but there will also be some which are not so familiar. This is because the methodology incorporates ideas from Systemic Functional Linguistics, a grammatical system which involves quite specific interpretations of how language works. The work you will do in class will investigate how sentences and clauses are constructed, and how they link together in a coherent way. I hope that it will be useful for when you have to read or write any type of text, not only discussion texts.

The materials will be used for the writing component of your course, and they will fit together with the work you do with your normal course book. I have asked Sean for his feedback as we go along, so that we can make sure that the lessons are as useful and enjoyable as possible, and I would appreciate also *your* feedback – both during the course and at the end. The aim is to help you to develop the writing skill as effectively as possible. At the beginning of the course and then again at the end, Sean will ask you to write a composition, so that we can look at the effect of the course on your writing. This composition would not affect your mark for the course in any way – I will mark it, if you want, but it will be used just as a point for comparison with the other group who are working with the project.

I hope that the lessons will help you to understand better how texts are put together – I know that when I was teaching I felt that writing was something many students didn't enjoy very much and that it was a skill they sometimes found quite difficult. The main aim of this project is that at the end of it you should feel more confident about your own writing, and also more confident about reading and understanding texts. The materials are based around texts about Darwin, but you don't need to have any previous knowledge of the topic – the texts have been chosen with the aim of generating

discussion, providing examples of different writing types and features, and stimulating your own writing.

The Open University regulations mean that I have to ask you to sign a consent form to say that you are willing to take part in the research, and this form is included with this letter. I hope that you will agree to participate, and that the work you do will help you in your studies.

**Best wishes**

*Sue Bowers*

# APPENDIX 3

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*Extracts from lessons incorporating compositions:*

## LESSON 5: Expositions, Discussions and Other Genres

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If the Darwin text from lesson 4 was done for homework, the underlined Themes could be checked together here.



### **PART 1**

You will be given a copy of text 2 (*Does Evolution Challenge Religion?*), cut up into paragraphs. The Themes are written in red; you should reassemble the text, and then suggest a heading for each paragraph.

### **PART 2**

For the second part of this activity, you need to reassemble compositions written by native speakers. The topic is similar to one that you might be asked to write on in an exam. Try to identify the Themes, and think about how the sentences and then the paragraphs link together.

### **PART 3**

We can distinguish between 2 types of texts which deal with arguments: expositions and discussions.

- An **exposition** is a factual text that is used to persuade people to a particular point of view. First the writer states a position and then constructs a series of arguments to support that position. The point of each argument is introduced then elaborated with supporting evidence.
- A **discussion** is a factual text that explores different sides of an issue in order to reach an informed judgement or recommendation. A discussion shares many of the language features of an exposition. Like an exposition, a discussion has arguments, but the arguments are balanced for and against the issue.

Can you decide whether the following texts fit with either of the above definitions?

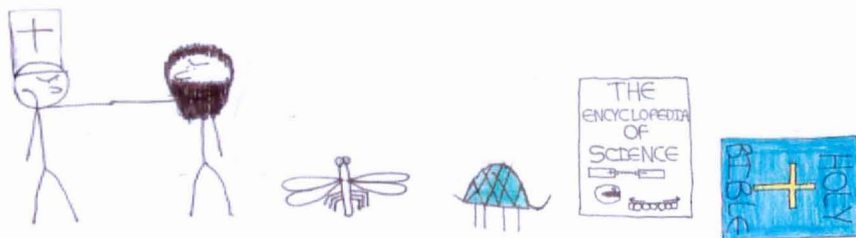
a) Your own text

b) The native-speaker compositions

c) The Darwin texts (*Does Evolution Challenge Religion?* and *Evidence for Evolution*)



If they don't seem to fit into either of the above categories, what sort of text are they? Do they have any features typical of the text-types described above? Is it useful to think of texts in terms of 'types' or 'genres'?



## LESSON 6: Building a Text

### PART 1

Discussion: in groups of 3 or 4, you should discuss whether or not it is possible to defend Darwin's ideas on evolution, and still maintain a religious belief. You should elect one member of your group to note down and report the main ideas back to the rest of the class at the end.

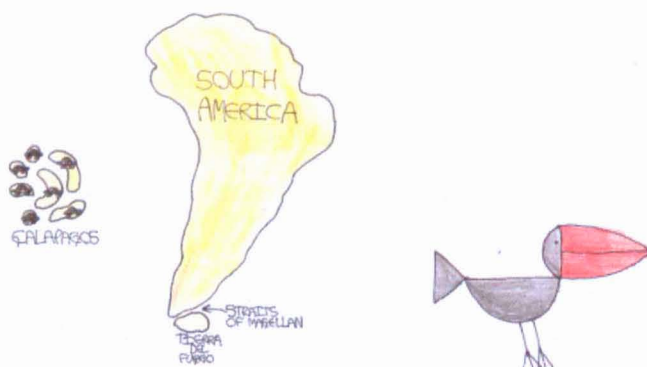
### PART 2

Look back at lesson 4, to revise the way a sentence can be divided into Themes and Rhemes.

a) In pairs, look at the essay you wrote at the beginning of the course, and try to identify some of the Themes you have used. Do these Themes signpost the reader effectively? Do they reach a logical conclusion in the final paragraph?

b) In the following clauses, the writer has made different decisions about what to put first. The change in order affects the way in which we understand the message, because it changes the element which we interpret as being most important. Clause 1 focusses on when the action took place, while clause 2 is about Darwin and clause 3 about the action. Within a text, all of these clauses would be possible (although some might be more common than others), but they each emphasise different aspects of the description or argument. Clauses 1 and 3 contain 'Marked Themes,' which means that they are not necessarily the most typical or expected. (These are dealt with in more detail in lesson 9).

1. **From May to November 1833**, Darwin spent most of his time ashore, collecting fossils.
2. **Darwin** spent most of his time ashore, from May to November 1833, collecting fossils.
3. **Collecting fossils**, Darwin spent most of his time ashore from May to November 1833.



How is the meaning in the following sentences changed by altering the Themes (in bold)? Why might each sentence be used?



1. *In 1831, Charles Darwin set off on a voyage round the world that was to change the history of science.*
2. *The history of science was to change when Charles Darwin set off on a voyage round the world in 1831.*
3. *Charles Darwin set off in 1831 on a voyage round the world that was to change the history of science.*

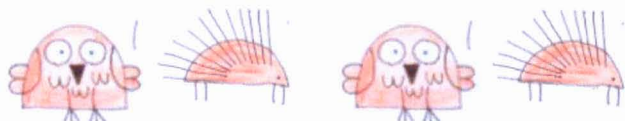
In each of the examples above, the information which the author wants to highlight is included in the Theme. Themes can vary in length, and there are different types: in lesson 4 you were introduced to Topical Themes, as these appear in all clauses. (Lessons 8 and 9 will look at other types). The choice of Theme is important from a grammatical and semantic point of view: we can use Themes and Rhemes to guide the reader through a text, and to make sure that the information we present and the meanings which develop from this information are clear and logically developed.



### PART 3

a) In groups of 3 or 4, think about the following questions, in relation to your own essay:

1. *How do you make sure that the reader knows where your argument is going?*
2. *How do you structure your argument (exposition or discussion?)*
3. *Are there any words or phrases that you use a lot? Are these devices used by the writer of the texts we are looking at?*
4. *Do you have elements of description mixed in with your argument?*
5. *How do you make your argument sound interesting and convincing, but not aggressive?*





# Appendix 4

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## QUESTIONNAIRE

*Thank you for your help with the research project. I would be very interested to know what you think about the materials that you have used in class.*

*Group:*

1. How do you feel about writing in English now?

2. In what ways have the classroom materials helped you with your writing?

3. What did you find were the main differences between the materials and the coursebook exercises you usually use for developing your writing? Were these differences good or bad?

4. What areas of writing has the course helped you to understand?

5. Were there any units which you especially liked or disliked?

(Could you say why?)

Do you have any other comments?

# Appendix 5

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## *Consent form for discursive writing project*

**Name:**

I understand that:

The project is concerned with methods of teaching and learning the writing skill. I have been fully informed of the aims and methodology of the project, and I understand this information.

If I choose to participate, I may withdraw my participation at any stage.

Any information which results from my participation will be used solely for the purposes of this research which may include publications.

The researcher will respect confidentiality as regards any information I may give, and the use of pseudonyms will preserve anonymity as far as is possible.

I will have access to the results of the project, and will be invited to participate in a feedback session following the teaching stage.

# Appendix 6

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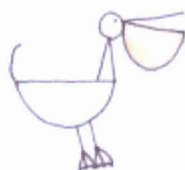
*introductions to teacher and student notes and example lessons*

## Writing: STUDENT MATERIALS



### INTRODUCTION

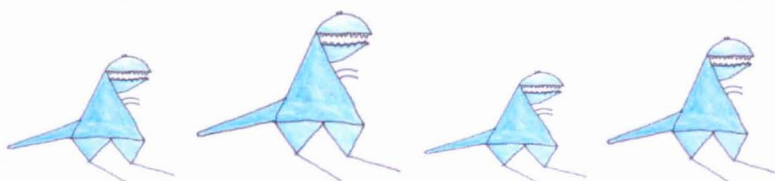
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The following series of lessons focuses on writing, using material from an exhibition celebrating the 150 year anniversary of the publication of Darwin's 'The Origin of Species'. These texts include features of discursives (argument texts), although they fit also into the genres of describing and explaining. Other texts from different sources, but connected to the same topic are used during the series of classes. The aim will be to look at language use within the context of a text as a whole, exploring how each text is constructed, and how coherence and cohesiveness are achieved. The focus is especially on *coherence*, and we will look at the different devices available to a writer. You will also need a copy of the essay that you write at the beginning of the course.

Some of the initial activities will be similar to those found in course books, but others may be less familiar to you. These will illustrate the ways in which different genres such as discursive, descriptions and explanations share some features of language use which determine how the writer organizes information and how the reader understands the message. As the course progresses, you will be asked to create your own texts, and finally to write another essay, incorporating the knowledge you have built up during the series of lessons.

Each lesson concludes with homework tasks which will consolidate and sometimes anticipate the work done in class.



# INTRODUCTION

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## The materials

The following series of lessons aims to develop the writing skill, using material from an exhibition celebrating the 150-year anniversary of the publication of Darwin's 'The Origin of Species', together with a variety of texts drawn from different sources but dealing with the same topic. The aim is to provide model texts which are informative and interesting, and which successfully present and develop different genres, such as explanations, descriptions and arguments. The texts used were chosen as examples of writing whose content is accessible but also challenging for students, and the series of lessons will look at how they are constructed, focusing especially on cohesion and the various devices available for achieving this. This will be done within the framework of a functional approach to grammar, which emphasizes the way in which we create meanings through the language choices we make.

While some of the initial activities will be similar to those found in any 'communicative' course book, others may be less familiar. Although there will be work on language uses such as 'linkers' and the overall structural features of a text, which are covered in mainstream course books and often associated with discursive writing in particular, these will be approached as examples of some of the devices available to the writer, rather than as the most important. Students will identify and explore organizational elements within the text (one of which is Theme - Rheme) which give coherence and create accessibility across genres, so that whatever 'composition type' the students might need to understand or write, this knowledge should be applicable.

The overall aim is to provide students with an awareness of the relationship between text and context, and with a deeper understanding of some of the ways in which a successful piece of writing is constructed. The focus throughout will therefore be on language use within the context of a text as a whole, beginning with a text itself rather than from isolated language items or decontextualised structure templates. Students will be asked to explore cohesive links, especially those connected with Thematic choices, and to discuss organizational patterns and other language choices within the texts as they develop their own writing.

Interwoven with the activities is work on essays written at the beginning of the course, so that a sense of relevance and accessibility is maintained. The 'to think about' sections relate the theory to the practice activities, and encourage students to think about how their own writing might be improved by an understanding of how the language choices we make determine the meanings we create.

## **The materials include:**

*Teachers' notes*

*Students' notes*

*Lesson 1 texts file*

*Darwin-now-exhibition booklet file*

*Does Evolution Challenge Religion? File*

*The Galapagos finches file*

*How did music evolve? file*

*Who was Darwin? file*

*Native-speaker compositions file*

## **The methodology**

A text-based methodology, which underlies these materials, involves some or all of the following stages:

1. Students and teachers explore the context for the texts they will be working with
2. Students carry out a series of structured activities working with the model texts (and in this case focusing especially on aspects of coherence and cohesiveness). They might then participate in a joint construction (with the teacher) of a text or part of a text.
3. Students use what they have learnt to engage with and/or produce texts of the same type. (They will be asked to think especially about the Thematic and organizational features of the texts which they have focussed upon in stage 2). The teacher gradually withdraws support, as the students work more and more independently, and students then participate in independent construction of a whole (or parts of) a text.
4. Revision and review sessions prepared by students. Students might experiment with and adapt the text type, perhaps combining it with other text types. The more structured and supported activities can be returned to when necessary.

Because of the limited number of hours available, the emphasis will be on stages 1-3, with the writing activities suggested for homework providing material for revision and consolidation.

# LESSON 7: Thematic Progression

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There are 3 common ways of organizing Thematic progression within a text:

**1. The constant Theme pattern** (repeating or referring to the same Theme over several clauses)

**Darwin's father** did not want him to join the *Beagle*. **He** wanted him to become a priest.

**Many on board the *Beagle*** were horrified by Darwin's collections of smelly, slimy sea creatures and huge, dusty fossils. **They** complained that this 'useless junk' made too much mess.

**2. The linear Theme pattern** (incorporating the Rheme from one clause into the Theme of the next)

HMS *Beagle* was one of six new ships built for the British Navy between 1817 and 1820. All were designed to carry Navy surveyors, who made surveys of seas and coast-lines.

Darwin collected nine species of snake and 80 different types of birds. Hummingbirds fluttered so quickly that Darwin said they looked like moths.

**3. The split Rheme Pattern** (the Rheme of the first clause has different components, which are used in turn as Theme for subsequent clauses)

Darwin's idea was that natural selection needs three things: variation, competition and inheritance.

Variation means that all individuals within a species have different characteristics.

With so many individuals competing against each other, the slight variations give some a better chance of survival.

Over many generations, modifications or adaptations might be seen, which could result in a new species.

What type of Thematic progression is used in

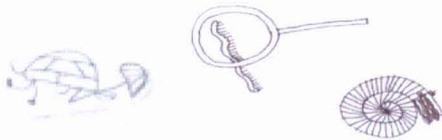


- a) text 1: *Evidence for Evolution* – then paragraph 2 ('Darwin laid out ..')?
- b) Text 2: *Does Evolution Challenge Religion?* paragraph 7 ('Darwin's most tenacious supporter)?

## PART 1

The following texts show different types of Thematic progression. The **Topical Themes** are written in bold. Each text works slightly differently, but they illustrate the importance of the order in which we present information.

Your teacher will ask you to look at 2 of the texts and the questions that go with them.



### Text 1

**Late in August 1832** the *Beagle* sailed south again to Bahia Blanca in Argentina, before heading out to sea to make more surveys. **Darwin** stayed behind to make expeditions on shore. **This time** he planned to make a collection of fossils. **He** had briefly studied geology back home in England. **Now** he had the opportunity to find out more. **Some of the world's greatest fossil-beds** were close by. **Below layers of rock in cliffs at Puerta Arena (now in Patagonia)** Darwin found gigantic fossil bones and teeth that must have belonged to enormous, amazing animals. But **what** were they, and **how** did they live? **Darwin** was puzzled. **He** could not identify the fossils, and **no other scientist** had ever reported such finds.

- a) The first sentence in the paragraph is called the hyper-theme: how does it help the reader to understand the text?
- b) **This time** and **now** are marked Themes – this means the writer has chosen to put some information at the beginning of the clause which s/he could have put in another position. What effect do these Themes have on the text?
- c) Can you find an example of a **cross-referential/linear** pattern (where the Rheme is picked up in the next Theme)?



### Text 2

**From May to November 1833**, Darwin spent much of his time ashore, on South America's east coast. **He** went riding with the gauchos, and **(he)\*** enjoyed eating, drinking and singing around their campfires. He learned about the local life, such as guanacos (wild



llama), agoutis (giant rats) and incredibly smelly deer. **He** sent letters home and **(he)\*** received permission from his father to hire a servant to help with his scientific work. **He** also sent many more specimens back to scientists in Cambridge. Most exciting of all, **Darwin** found yet more fossils. **These** were far inland, but **(they were)\*** buried under a layer of fossilized sea-shells. **One fossil** puzzled him tremendously, because **it** was not like living local species. **Had this creature** lived in a sea that had disappeared long ago?

*\*the Theme here is in brackets, because it is not written in the text, but is understood by the reader*

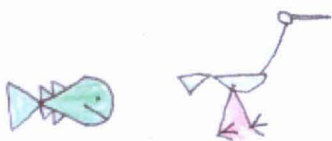


- What type of Thematic progression is used mainly in the first half of the text?
- What would happen if you took the first sentence out of the text?
- Darwin** found yet more fossils. These were far inland shows a particular type of Thematic progression. Which type?
- Towards the end of the text, the focus changes from Darwin to another topic. What is the topic, and how is this change of focus reflected in the Themes?

### Text 3

**Darwin** realized that Natural Selection could explain many of the things that had puzzled him on his travels. **It was why** the Galapagos finches were different from island to island. **It was why** rainforest orchids had such beautiful flowers – to attract insects to spread pollen to fertilise them. **It was why** some beetles were the same colour as the vegetation they lived on – the camouflage protected them. **It was even why** fossils were different from their living relatives – **they** had died out because they were the weaker forms of their species.

- What does *it* refer to in the repeated Theme?
- What effect does the repetition have on the reader?
- What is the function of the opening sentence?



### Text 4

**Humans, apes and other mammals** share many features in common. **Some of these shared features** are obvious. For example, **there are** only minor differences between the

basic skeletons of humans and apes, and even **their brains** are quite similar. Moreover, **many features that look different on the surface** are in fact closely related. **The hand of a man, the paw of a dog, the flipper of a porpoise, and even the wing of a bat** all have the same bones in the exact same order; **they've** just evolved to be longer or shorter depending on whether they're used for grasping, walking, swimming or flying. **Darwin** concluded that **the only explanation for all these similarities** was that all the species were related.

- a) What is the Thematic pattern that links the first 2 sentences?
- b) The Rheme of the penultimate sentence (*grasping, walking, swimming or flying*) refers directly back to a Theme. Which one?
- c) What does the Thematic *they* refer to in *they've just evolved*?



**PART 2: WORKING FROM A SKELETON TEXT.**

Your teacher will read you another text from the series of texts making up the Darwin exhibition. The title is *How did Music Evolve?*

You will be given a skeleton text, in which only the first and last paragraphs are reproduced. You should listen to the text several times. The first time you hear it, try to identify where each new paragraph begins, and make a note of the Topic sentences. When you listen again, try to identify the Themes, and make brief notes on the content of each paragraph. You should not try to reproduce exactly all of the text: concentrate on the Topic sentences and the Themes, and then try to fill out the text in a way that makes sense.



**To think about**

*Research into Theme progression suggests that native and non-native speakers organize texts differently. Non-native speakers might rely more on repeated Themes to advance the argument within the text, while native speakers use more (and manage more successfully) cross-referential Themes. Too many repeated Themes may give a 'spoken' feel to a written text and, if the Themes are unpredictable, we may feel we are reading series of disconnected ideas rather than a cohesive argument. Nonetheless, sometimes a repeated Theme over part of a text can successfully advance the argument (cf discussion for lesson 2, part 2, above).*

## **At home**

Your teacher will give you 2 texts. They both present the same information, but they are organised differently.

*Which text is easier to follow?*

*What has been changed?*

*Can you identify the pattern of Thematic progression in each? How do the Themes guide the reader through the texts?*

# Appendix 7

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## *student materials, lesson 1*

### ***To think about***

***In order to write effectively in a foreign language, we need to understand the relationship between grammar, meaning and context. What do people talk about, and how do they talk about it? What is the relationship between writer and reader? We need to know how to combine the grammatical structures together into a text which is clear and effective, and says what we want to say. A student writing an essay for an exam needs to know how to do this without sounding rude, or even offensive, and without becoming boring or repetitive. What sort of things are the examiners looking for? What makes a text successful? Over the next few lessons we will look at how the organisation of ideas within a sentence and the way these sentences connect together can determine the success or otherwise of a piece of writing.***

# Appendix 8

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## *lesson 2 discussion activity*

### **PART 2: DISCUSSION**

Look together at the text, and think about the following questions.

1. **The introduction** contains 2 main ideas describing what Darwin did, the first beginning with 'Darwin expounded' and the second with 'he presented'. Which words within the text help to link these ideas to the opening premise, and then to create continuity? What does 'he' refer to? What does 'them' refer to?

These types of words are called referents, and they help to create cohesion, link ideas together, and avoid repetition. When you write, you need to be sure that the referents you use are effective, and that they refer to the person (or thing, or idea etc.) that you want them to refer to). Can you find any more examples in the next paragraphs?

2. **Paragraph 1** ('Darwin laid out ...') takes up one of the ideas mentioned in the previous paragraph – which one? How does the organisation of the sentences help the reader to follow the argument? How do words like 'equally' and 'also' help too?

3. **Paragraph 2** How does the final word of the opening sentence link with the beginnings of the next 3 sentences? What does the repetition here do?

4. **Paragraph 3** how does the first sentence link with the first sentence of paragraph 2? What is this other evidence? Where is this clause located within the sentence? Why?

5. **Paragraph 4** introduces an important idea in the first part of the second sentence; what is this idea? The second part of the sentence begins with 'this'. What does 'this' refer to?

Look together at one paragraph from the essay you wrote at the beginning of the course. Can you find any of the features discussed above? Is it easy to agree on a heading for the paragraph?



# Appendix 9

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*Additional Teacher and Student materials for lessons 3 and 4:*

## **PART 1**

Before beginning, students could be given a few minutes to write down (either individually or working together) one or two examples of each of the following

1. new vocabulary
2. information about Darwin
3. new ideas about writing

that they remember from the last 2 lessons. They could then come up to the front and write their ideas up in one of 3 columns, on the board.

Look at the *Evidence for Evolution – then* text from last lesson. Discuss the following questions together, and make notes of your answers.

The students could choose 2 or 3 of the questions to discuss in pairs, and then discuss their answers together as a class.

The answers to the other questions (which are in the students' notes) could then be enlarged and numbered and put on the wall around the classroom – the students could then walk around the classroom and identify the answer (by number – they would not have to write all the answer down) for each question. Or the answers could be photocopied and given to groups of 3 and 4, to be matched with each question.

Think about the essay you wrote at the beginning of this course (or another you have written recently). Can you discuss any of the above questions in relation to that essay? What would you consider to be the most important points?

Students could concentrate on a few of the more straightforward questions (e.g. 4, 5 and 6).

## **PART 2: SOME DIFFERENT TEXT-TYPES**

Before doing the exercise, student could be given the following **definitions**, **translations** and **synonyms**, and asked to match them with words in the texts.

## a) recount

The opposite of *success* (failure)

No *soportaba* (he could not face)

*Sacerdote* (priest)

Killing (with a gun) (shooting)

*Escarabajos* (beetles)

Somebody who studies animals and plants (naturalist)

Prepared (set)

*Intranquilo* (restless)

With enthusiasm (eagerly)

*Unas muestras* (specimens)

When (by the time)

Questioned (challenged)

Proved to be wrong (overturned)

Established the basis for (laid down the foundations)

## b) explanation

*transmit* (pass on)

*babies* (offspring)

*developing* (evolving)



# LESSON 4: Themes and Rhemes

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## PART 1

Before giving the students the *Galapagos finches* text, the students could be given the following set of questions and answers, and asked to match them up. They could either do this in groups, by physically putting the cut-up questions and answers together, or they could work in pairs, one using a sheet with only the questions on, and one using a sheet with only the answers (reprinted in a different order). These 2 sheets are included below.

Where are the Galapagos Islands?

*Nearly 1000 km off the coast of Ecuador*

What did Darwin notice about the birds (the finches) on the Galapagos islands?

*They were a little different from the birds in South America (where those on the Galapagos had originally come from)*

Were all the finches on the Galapagos the same?

*No. They had different beaks.*

Why had they developed different shaped beaks?

*Because they had adapted to survive on their particular island: each habitat contained different food sources.*

Why did some have small beaks?

*For picking up tiny seeds.*

Why did some have big beaks?

*For breaking open large, tough seeds.*

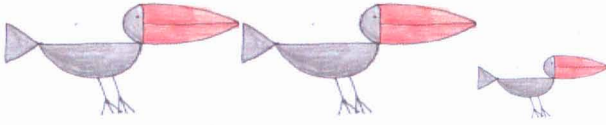
Why did some have narrow beaks?

*For digging out insects from small holes.*

Why are the finches so important?

*Because they are an excellent example of how new species evolve.*

## Student 1: Questions



Where are the Galapagos Islands?

What did Darwin notice about the birds (the finches) on the Galapagos islands?

Were all the finches on the Galapagos the same?

Why had they developed different shaped beaks?

Why did some have small beaks?

Why did some have big beaks?

Why did some have narrow beaks?

Why are the finches so important?

## Student 2: Answers



*For picking up tiny seeds.*

*Because they are an excellent example of how new species evolve.*

*Because they had adapted to survive on their particular island: each habitat contained different food sources.*

*Nearly 1000 km off the coast of Ecuador*

*They were a little different from the birds in South America (where those on the Galapagos had originally come from)*

*For breaking open large, tough seeds.*

*No. They had different beaks.*

*For digging out insects from small holes.*

# Appendix 10

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## Example scripts

### CAE experimental

**From my point of view, the best method to evaluate students** is a mixture of a final exam and a coursework assessment.

**To be honest, a better representation of the students' global knowledge** is provided by a final exam, *because in this type of exam* is necessary to understand the whole subject to make connections between the concepts. *However, I understand that a coursework assessment* is useful to the teacher, *because it* shows the progress of the class. **The statistic information that a coursework assessment provides**, can be used for the teacher to modify the control of the class. *In addition, this type of evaluation* has another positive aspect, *which is that as the student has to study everyday*, the understanding of the subject is going to be better.

**Taking all these things in consideration**, a mixture would be better. *However, what* are we going to do with people who work? **The majority of students** are full-time, *but a great number of people* has to work to pay their own studies. *In this case, a coursework assessment* cannot be done, *because is impossible* for this people to study every day. *So, in my opinion, a coursework assessment* is unfair for this people.

*In conclusion, from my point of view, the best method to evaluate students* is a mixture of a final exam and a coursework assessment. **But to make it more fair**, people who work should have the chance to choose their own method of evaluation.

**L3 experimental**

**I think that the best method of assessment for students** is a coursework assessment. I explain now **why** I think that.

*Firstly, I think that the students* learn more *if they* study every day. **When you have a final exam**, the students only study one week before the exam *or in sometimes they* study one day before. **I think this method (a final exam)** is the most used *but it* isn't the best, *because the students* study *but* don't learn the matter. *In addition, if the students work every day*, they do the homework and they read the matter all days; **his final marks** are better *and the students when finish his degree, they* can find a good job. *In opposite, the people that do a degree* sometimes are working for pay his studies. *In this case, the coursework assessment* not is possible, *because they* come to the university in the morning *and they* work in the afternoon. **When they arrive at home**, they are very tired *and* don't do his homework *and* don't have time for study.

**Is difficult for my** chose a good method of assessment for all students, *because both methods* are good and bad things.



# Appendix 11

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## *Theme type*

### **CAE 2E CONTROL pre-test TOTALS (12 scripts)**

Average number of words per script: 266

Average number of **interpersonal Themes** per script: 3.4

Average number of *Textual Themes* per script: 11.6

Average number of **Topical Themes** per script: 20.5

### **CAE 2E CONTROL post-test TOTALS (7 scripts)**

Average number of words per script: 254

Average number of **interpersonal Themes** per script: 1.28

Average number of *Textual Themes* per script: 12.42

Average number of **Topical Themes** per script: 21

### **3A EXPERIMENTAL pre-test TOTALS (19 scripts)**

Average number of words per script: 209

Average number of **interpersonal Themes** per script: 3.9

Average number of *Textual Themes* per script: 13.8

Average number of **Topical Themes** per script: 20.47

### 3A EXPERIMENTAL post-test TOTALS (11 scripts)

Average number of words per script: 204

Average number of **interpersonal Themes** per script: 3.18

Average number of *Textual Themes* per script: 13.9

Average number of **Topical Themes** per script: 19.18

### 3H CONTROL pre-test TOTALS (13 scripts)

Average number of words per script: 220

Average number of **interpersonal Themes** per script: 4

Average number of *Textual Themes* per script: 14

Average number of **Topical Themes** per script: 20.76

### 3H CONTROL post-test TOTALS (10 scripts)

Average number of words per script: 190

Average number of **interpersonal Themes** per script: 2.6

Average number of *Textual Themes* per script: 13.5

Average number of **Topical Themes** per script: 20.5



# Appendix 12

## *division of Marked Themes*

### CAE 2E CONTROL PRE-TEST MARKED THEMES

% of Topical Themes: 32%

(total Marked Themes: 79, total Topical Themes: 246)

CIRCUM (C) 19 (24.05%)

Location (time)9 location (place)3 status, role 0 extent 0 manner 5 contingency0  
matter 1 angle 1 cause 1

THEMATISED COMMENT (TC) 14 (17.72%)

DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC) 12 (15.18%)

HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses) 25 (31.64%)

NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF) 9 (11.39%)

### CAE 2E CONTROL POST-TEST MARKED THEMES

% of Topical Themes: 35%

(total Marked Themes: 52, total Topical Themes: 147)

CIRCUM (C) 11 (21.15%)

Location (time) 6 location (place) 0 status, role 0 extent 0 manner (means) 2  
contingency 1 cause 2

THEMATISED COMMENT (TC) 8 (15.38%)

DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC) 7 (13.46%)

HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses) 18 (34.61%)

NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF) 8 (15.38%)

3A EXPERIMENTAL PRE-TEST MARKED THEMES

% of Topical Themes: 26%

(total Marked Themes: 102 , total Topical Themes: 389)

CIRCUM (C) 32 (31.37%)

Location (time) 11 location (place) 14 status, role 1 extent 1 manner 2 contingency 0 matter 1 angle 2 cause 1 means 1

THEMATISED COMMENT (TC) 13 (12.74%)

DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC) 32 (31.37%)

HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses) 22 (21.56%)

NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF) 3 (2.94%)

3A EXPERIMENTAL POST-TEST MARKED THEMES

% of Topical Themes: 25 %

(total Marked Themes: 53, total Topical Themes: 211)

CIRCUM (C) 14 (26.41%)

Location (time) 7 location (place) 5 status, role 0 extent 0 manner (means) 1 contingency 0 cause 1

THEMATISED COMMENT (TC) 6 (11.32%)

DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC) 14 (26.41%)

HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses) 10 (18.86%)

NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF) 9 (16.98%)

3H CONTROL PRE-TEST MARKED THEMES

% of Topical Themes: 31%

(total Marked Themes: 84, total Topical Themes: 270)

CIRCUM (C) 30 (35.71%)

Location (time) 14 location (place) 5 status, role 0 extent 5 manner 7 contingency 0 matter 1 angle 0 cause 0 means 0

THEMATISED COMMENT (TC) 14 (16.67%)

DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC) 27 (32.14%)

HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses) 9 (10.7%)

NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF) 4 (4.76%)

3H CONTROL POST-TEST MARKED THEMES

% of Topical Themes: 15 %

(total Marked Themes: 32, total Topical Themes: 205)

CIRCUM (C) 10 (31.25%)

Location (time) 6 location (place) 1 status, role 0 extent 0 manner (means) 2 contingency 0 cause 2

THEMATISED COMMENT (TC) 4 (12.5%)

DEPENDENT CLAUSE (DC) 8 (25%)

HEAVY THEME (HT) (includes some non-finite clauses) 8 (25%)

NON-FINITE CLAUSE (NF) 2 (6.25%)

# Appendix 13

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## *Thematic progression results*

3H CONTROL pre-test TOTALS (13 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 137: average 10.53

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 32 (7U) average: (not including U 1.92), including 3

3H CONTROL post-test TOTALS (10 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 119: average 11.9

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 28: average 2.8

3A EXPERIMENTAL pre-test TOTALS (19 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 238: average 12.52

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 55 (4 U) average: (not including U 2.68), including 2.89

3A EXPERIMENTAL post-test TOTALS (11 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 114: average 10.36

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 39 (1 U): average: (not including U 3.45), including 3.54

CAE 2C EXPERIMENTAL

pre-test TOTALS (13 scripts)

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 30 (1U) average: (not including U 2.23), including 2.3

post-test TOTALS (3 scripts)

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 21 (1U) : average: (not including U 6.66), including 7



### CAE 2E CONTROL

#### pre-test TOTALS (12 scripts)

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 45 (2U) average: (not including U 3.58), including 3.75 corrected to 46 (2U) average: (not including U 3.66) including 3.83

#### post-test TOTALS (7 scripts)

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: (35: average 5) corrected to : 29 (1 U): average (not including U 4), including 4.1

### 3A EXPERIMENTAL

#### pre-test TOTALS (19 scripts)

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 55 (4 U) average: (not including U 2.68), including 2.89

#### post-test TOTALS (11 scripts)

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 39 (1 U): average: (not including U 3.45), including 3.54

### 3H CONTROL

#### pre-test TOTALS (13 scripts)

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 32 (7U) average: (not including U 1.92), including 3

#### post-test TOTALS (10 scripts)

Linear (zig-zag)Theme pattern: 29: average 2.9 corrected to 28 average: 2.8

### CAE 2C EXPERIMENTAL

#### pre-test TOTALS (13 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 114: average 8.76

#### post-test TOTALS (3 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 16: average 5.33

### CAE 2E CONTROL

pre-test TOTALS (12 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 114: average 9.5

CAE 2E CONTROL post-test TOTALS (7 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 48: average 6.85

### 3A EXPERIMENTAL

pre-test TOTALS (19 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 238: average 12.52

post-test TOTALS (11 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 114: average 10.36

### 3H CONTROL

pre-test TOTALS (13 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 137: average 10.53

post-test TOTALS (10 scripts)

Constant Theme pattern: 119: average 11.9

# Appendix 14

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## *Extracts from student and teacher materials*

### *Lesson 8: Student materials for Interpersonal Theme*

#### *From The Origin of Species:*

It may be worth while to sum up the foregoing remarks...

It has been asserted over and over again, by writers who believe in the immutability of species...

It may be doubted whether...

It would seem that...

It should not be forgotten that...

There are other ways to make a text seem less dogmatic: *Modal finites* (e.g. *might, will, could, would*) and/or the use of *it* as Theme can also help to position the reader without sounding too forceful or direct. These structures allow a movement (characteristic of many argument texts) from the personal voice which expresses subjective opinion (*I think... you shouldn't...*) to the impersonal voice.

#### *b) Interpersonal grammatical metaphor and Mood Adjuncts*

The following are examples of *Interpersonal grammatical metaphor* (*I think, I believe*) and *Mood Adjuncts*: they can express opinion or recommendation, and are another type of Interpersonal Theme.

***I think, I believe, no doubt, maybe, certainly***

**I think** indicates the personal voice of the writer, and it can be an effective way of expressing an opinion without sounding too forceful. It does not usually indicate uncertainty (it often has the meaning of 'probably'), and it can make an argument sound more acceptable.



*If we can understand how texts position their audience and promote, or make invisible, particular points of view, we will be more able to evaluate the texts of others and understand how we may be influenced by language functions. ('to think about' section, lesson 8)*

## **Lesson 8: Teacher materials for Interpersonal Theme**

*Within an exposition or discussion, arguments and evidence are selected and described in ways which encourage the reader to accept the writer's point of view. As readers, we need to be able to assess the accuracy of the evidence offered by a text, and as writers we need to be able to present this evidence in ways which make both the ideas and our position clear to the reader. We might want to include different perspectives or to position ourselves somewhere between a definite yes or no; there are various resources available for doing this, one of which is **Interpersonal Themes**. It is important for students to understand at least some of what is a very complex area of grammar, because people outside the classroom are likely to be less tolerant of errors with this type of (interpersonal) meaning than they would be with other areas of the language.*

# Appendix 15

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## Lesson 8: Student materials for Textual Theme

### PART 1: TEXTUAL THEMES

**Textual Themes** are another type of Theme, and they work together with Topical Themes. (Some sentences have several different Themes, but they must always have a Topical Theme). Textual Themes are the ‘linkers’ which are often taught in coursebooks as ways of structuring texts, especially perhaps with discursive compositions. These types of words or expressions can be Thematic if they are used at the beginning of a clause to signpost the discussion. They are a part of textual organization, but you need to be careful not to overuse them; all of the aspects of texts that we have looked at in previous lessons are equally as important in writing successful texts.

From ‘to think about’ section at the end of unit 8:

***The choice of clause-type and the way they combine within a text are other ways of building textual cohesion and organising ideas.***

## Lesson 8: Teacher materials for Textual Theme

Students will be familiar with **Textual Themes**, because they are often emphasised in coursebooks as language items which help organise a text. But they are sometimes overused, and if students rely on them at the expense of other textual features, their writing can be stilted and uninteresting.

# Appendix 16

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## Lesson 9: Student materials for Marked Theme

Can you organize the following sentences into a paragraph? What effect do the Themes (**in bold**) have here?

**If he had identified the fossils correctly**, his findings were going to challenge some very important ideas!

**Instead** they were related to animals still living in South America, such as sloths and armadillos.

**The fossils he had found** did not belong to species that had become extinct long ago.

**As soon as he could** – in November 1832 – Darwin sent specimens to England.

**Slowly** Darwin began to understand what he was seeing.

### *To think about*

*The purpose of a Marked Theme might be to draw the reader's attention to a particular word or phrase, but it might also be used to construct a more coherent text, and to make the argument easier to follow. Marked Themes don't coincide with the subject, in the way that Topical Themes often do, but they highlight important pieces of information. Certain types of text, such as instructions, legal arguments and scientific explanations, depend on Marked Themes to achieve their purpose, and it is easier to understand how these Themes contribute to meaning if they are part (or at least a consideration) of our own writing.*

## Lesson 9: Teacher materials for Marked Theme

*Moving those elements which the writer wants to highlight into clause-initial position is a common way of creating a Marked Theme. There is a point in students' language development where it is useful to understand how to foreground specific clause elements or depart from the unmarked pattern when necessary. Although different textual forms (or genres) are often discussed in terms of their structure, much of the generic variation actually occurs at the level of grammar. This section looks at grammatical structures which are often typical of discursive texts, and considers how they help to create meaning and contribute to the organisation of the text.*

The Themes in the following paragraph help convey the process of Darwin's thinking – as he slowly began to realize what he had found.

**Slowly** Darwin began to understand what he was seeing. **The fossils he had found** did not belong to species that had become extinct long ago. **Instead** they were related to animals still living in South America, such as sloths and armadillos. **As soon as he could** – in November 1832 – Darwin sent specimens to England. **If he had identified the fossils correctly**, his findings were going to challenge some very important ideas!

# Appendix 17

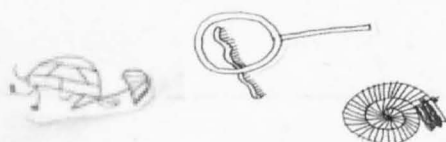
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## Lesson 7: Student materials for Thematic progression

### PART 1

The following texts show different types of Thematic progression. The **Topical Themes** are written in bold. Each text works slightly differently, but they illustrate the importance of the order in which we present information.

Your teacher will ask you to look at 2 of the texts and the questions that go with them.



#### Text 1

**Late in August 1832** the *Beagle* sailed south again to Bahia Blanca in Argentina, before heading out to sea to make more surveys. **Darwin** stayed behind to make expeditions on shore. **This time** he planned to make a collection of fossils. **He** had briefly studied geology back home in England. **Now** he had the opportunity to find out more. **Some of the world's greatest fossil-beds** were close by. **Below layers of rock in cliffs at Puerta Arena (now in Patagonia)** Darwin found gigantic fossil bones and teeth that must have belonged to enormous, amazing animals. But **what** were they, and **how** did they live? **Darwin** was puzzled. **He** could not identify the fossils, and **no other scientist** had ever reported such finds.

- The first sentence in the paragraph is called the hyper-theme: how does it help the reader to understand the text?
- This time** and **now** are marked Themes – this means the writer has chosen to put some information at the beginning of the clause which s/he could have put in another position. What effect do these Themes have on the text?
- Can you find an example of a **cross-referential/linear** pattern (where the Rheme is picked up in the next Theme)?

### **To think about**

***Research into Theme progression suggests that native and non-native speakers organize texts differently. Non-native speakers might rely more on repeated Themes to advance the argument within the text, while native speakers use more (and manage more successfully) cross-referential Themes. Too many repeated Themes may give a 'spoken' feel to a written text and, if the Themes are unpredictable, we may feel we are reading series of disconnected ideas rather than a cohesive argument. Nonetheless, sometimes a repeated Theme over part of a text can successfully advance the argument.***



# Appendix 18

## Derived Themes

### L3 cont, pre

I think that it depends, there are people who think that the best is an only final exam but other people prefer a coursework assessment.

The advantages about the three methods of assessment are few. I think that if you have only final exam, you won't worry about the classes and your assistance; you only think about the exam. But, if you prefer coursework, you will be more prepared about the classes, you will learn a lot of things. Finally, if you prefer a mixture of both, you will be able to express in an exam the things that you have learnt.

The disadvantages about this method are few too. I think that if you tried a final exam, you won't learn everything, as soon as if you prefer a coursework assessment, you will worry about the classes, the assistance there and the participation in the classes. Finally, if you prefer a mixture of both, you will have a lot of work, you will be stressed and nervous.

Finally, I think that the best method of assessment is the coursework because you will be continuous and constant, you will learn a lot of things; and it's very positive for the future because you grow up for the personality. I think that this method is better than the others, because the others, for me, are more stressed and important.

Constant Theme pattern: 9

Linear (zig-zag) Theme pattern: 0

Derived Theme: 2 strands



## CAE cont, post

No one would dispute the fact that internet is something that has made our life easier than it was before but if we think about it we will find that there are as many advantages as disadvantages of using internet for our university studies.

On the one hand, we can gather quickly and if you are a university student you are bound to know that allocating time for yourself is something very valuable. Furthermore, it is easy to compare information with internet and on account of that fact, students can do better works. It usually happened that when a student looked for information, he used to use only one book and he did not contrast it to others and with internet it has been solved.

On the other hand, it is widely believe that internet is unsure. If you are not careful, a virus can enter your PC and erase all your information, regardless of the fact that you have to pay a lot of money for fixing it. Not only is internet unsure, but (missing Theme) also distracting. When you are using internet supposedly for "your university studies", it is easy to be in Facebook or chatting at the same time, and this make you be slower than you used to be when you did not use it.

All of this (refers to all) leads me to the conclusion that although internet has arouse criticism, if you are responsible and you know how to use it, you can benefit from it and take advantage of all its features.

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Constant Theme pattern: 9 (1 long chain)

Linear (zig-zag) Theme pattern: 3 instances (plus All of this (refers to all))

Derived Theme: yes

# Appendix 19

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## *List of all provided teaching materials*

The teaching materials were presented in the form of materials for the students and accompanying notes for the teacher. Additional texts for use during the course were also provided with the teacher notes.

## *Student Materials and Teachers' Notes*

### **Introduction**

Outline of content and aims of course.

### **Lesson 1: Darwin**

The relationship between grammar, meaning and context. Introduction to the idea of Theme.

### **Lesson 2: Organising a Text**

Devices to establish textual coherence and cohesion. Reference. Structure of information reports.

### **Lesson 3: Understanding the Context**

Different text-types: recount, explanation. Chains of reference. Making linguistic choices.

### **Lesson 4: Themes and Rhemes**

Topical Theme and Rheme. How information is presented in a text.

### **Lesson 5: Expositions, Discussions and Other Genres**

Example of discussion text, preparation for writing this text-type.

### **Lesson 6: Building a Text.**

Text structure. Reader-writer relationship. Skeleton compositions for exposition and discussion. Relationship between grammatical form and function.

### **Lesson 7: Thematic progression**

Constant Theme, linear Theme, split Theme patterns.

## **Lesson 8: Other Types of Theme**

Textual Themes, Interpersonal Themes (Comment Adjuncts, Mood Adjuncts). Modal Finites.

## **Lesson 9: Marked Themes**

Clauses as Theme, Circumstantial Themes.

## **Lesson 10: Nominalisation**

Comparing spoken and written versions of a text.

## ***Additional Texts***

The texts are taken from the *Darwin Now Exhibition, 2009*, unless otherwise stated. The lessons in which they are used are indicated below.

Texts from 'Suffering Scientists' (Arnold, N., 2000) **(lesson 1)**

Text 1: 'Evidence for Evolution – then' **(lesson 2)**

'The Galapagos Finches' **(lesson 4)**

Text 2: 'Does Evolution Challenge Religion?' **(lesson 5)**

'How did Music Evolve?' **(lesson 7)**

'Who was Darwin?' **(lesson 9)**

Native speaker compositions **(throughout the course)**